

The background of the cover is a light yellow-green gradient. It is decorated with several stylized, light green leaf motifs scattered across the surface. These motifs consist of a small stem with two leaves, appearing to float or drift across the page.

# **A HISTORY OF ORGANIZED LABOR IN BOLIVIA**

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**Robert J. Alexander**

 ***Greenwood***  
PUBLISHING GROUP

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*Robert J. Alexander*

*With the Collaboration of  
Eldon M. Parker*

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To Lourdes Cuellar Alexander

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## Contents

<i>Preface</i>	ix
Introduction	1
1. Bolivian Organized Labor before the Chaco War	5
2. Unionism from the Chaco War to the Bolivian National Revolution	37
3. Organized Labor during the Bolivian National Revolution	75
4. Organized Labor after the Bolivian National Revolution	123
<i>Bibliography</i>	179
<i>Index</i>	187

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## Preface

My interest in organized labor in Latin America was first sparked by a course in Latin American history that I took with Professor Frank Tannenbaum at Columbia University in the late 1930s. I wrote a paper in that course for Dr. Tannenbaum on the history of the labor movement of Argentina. Subsequently, I wrote my master's thesis on the history of organized labor in Chile and, after World War II, my doctoral dissertation on labor relations in that country.

In later years, I was fortunate to be associated with two men who made it possible for me to develop a considerable amount of personal contact with the labor organization of the region. These were Serafino Romualdi, who described himself as the U.S. labor movement's "ambassador" to organized labor of the region; and Jay Lovestone, who for many years was virtually "foreign minister" of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and then of the AFL-CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations). During the 1950s and early 1960s, I traveled extensively in Latin America for Lovestone, reporting back to him on my observations on the labor movements and the general economic and political conditions of the countries that I visited. Subsequently, I sought as much as possible to maintain my interest in Latin American organized labor during my extensive travels to the area.

In 1975, I had the good fortune of being part of a two-man team commissioned by the Agency for International Development (AID) to study the operations of the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), the organization working with Latin American and Caribbean labor movements, which was administered by the AFL-CIO and largely financed by the AID. Among the

countries that I was asked to visit was Bolivia, where I was able to see the Bolivian labor movement at a time when it was being particularly badly treated by the regime of General Hugo Banzer.

In recent years, I have been working on a history of organized labor in Latin America and the Caribbean. This study reached such dimensions that it became clearly impossible to appear as a single "opus." So I have broken it down into studies of particular countries or groups of countries. The present work is one of these studies.

During the period before the Bolivian National Revolution, any student of organized labor in that country was faced with what might be best termed a "Black Legend" concerning the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR), which was for long the political party with most influence in the labor movement. It was widely pictured in Bolivia and abroad as being "Nazi-fascist" in origin and orientation. This view was shared for several years by the U.S. government and even by some of those people in the U.S. labor movement who were concerned with organized labor in Latin America.

Although my first contacts with Bolivian trade unionism in 1947 raised serious doubts in my mind about this "Black Legend," it was not until after the beginning of the Bolivian National Revolution in 1952 that I was completely disabused of any such ideas. Anyone who witnessed to any degree the kind of transformation that the MNR regime was trying to bring about after April 1952 could not help but be convinced that the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario had, in fact, been subjected to a smear campaign sponsored particularly by the Bolivian *rosca*, that is, the ruling landlord-mining interest oligarchy, whose four-century-long domination of Bolivian society the MNR was challenging and many of whom were the country's real "Nazi-fascist" sympathizers.

Like all authors, I owe debts to a variety of people who have facilitated the task of seeing this work into print. First, of course, I am obliged to the Bolivian trade unionists, political leaders, and other people—including more or less well informed foreigners, who over the years submitted to my questioning about their organizations and themselves.

In the second place, I owe a major debt to Serafino Romualdi and Jay Lovestone, who made it possible for me to develop a wide personal acquaintanceship with Bolivian organized labor. I am obliged to those people in the Agency for International Development who facilitated my renewing my acquaintance with the Bolivian labor movement during a period in which it was suffering

particularly severe punishment at the hands of the incumbent government.

As has been the case with most of my recent books, I owe much to Dr. James Sabin, of the Greenwood Publishing Group, for seeing the value of this and other various works of mine, and Eldon Parker, my onetime student and long-term friend, who has not only prepared the camera-ready pages but also been a most capable copy editor, catching many a mistake. Those mistakes that remain, of course, are my own responsibility.

Finally, as always, I owe much to my late wife, Joan, who put up with my working on this history of Bolivian organized labor when she must have often thought that my attention might better have been centered on other things.

Rutgers University  
New Brunswick, NJ



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## Introduction

Bolivia experienced one of the three most fundamental Latin American social revolutions of the twentieth century, Mexico and Cuba being the other two. Organized labor played a key role in this upheaval. For several years it shared a "co-government" with the party that led the revolution, the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR), and even after that ended, the labor movement remained for more than a generation one of the country's most powerful institutions.

The labor movement had its origins among the artisans of La Paz and a few other cities in the later decades of the nineteenth century. However, as in most Latin American countries, the early labor organizations were mutual benefit societies rather than *sindicatos* (trade unions). It was well into the twentieth century before *sindicatos*, or "resistance societies" (as the anarchists called them), began to appear. Many of these were of anarchosyndicalist ideology.

During the 1920s, organized labor expanded considerably, with the first serious efforts being made to unionize the railroaders and the mine workers. Militancy of those unions brought strong reprisals from successive governments, and during the disastrous Chaco War with Paraguay of 1932–1935, the labor movement was in large part destroyed, its remnants being forced to function illegally.

However, one effect of the Chaco War was to cause widespread disillusionment with, and resistance to, the existing social, economic, and political system. This found expression in the establishment of a number of political parties dedicated to altering or overthrowing that system, most of which sought influence in

the labor movement, which recovered rapidly with the end of the war.

The most successful of these new parties was the *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario*. It soon came to be the dominant group within the miners' federation, which soon came to have within its ranks most of the workers in the country's most strategic industry.

Two other groups of major significance appeared in the post-Chaco War period. One was the *Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores de Bolivia* (CSTB), a central labor group with strength particularly among artisans, factory workers, and white-collar employees in the major cities. Control of it was contested between more or less Trotskyist parties and the Stalinoid *Partido de Izquierda Revolucionaria* (PIR). The other was the *Federación Obrera Local*, centered in La Paz and among Indian peasants in the vicinity of the capital, and its counterparts in a few other cities, all of which were of anarchist orientation. (Both of these were to disappear after the beginning of the National Revolution, giving way to the *Central Obrera Boliviana*.)

This upsurge of organized labor took place against the background of great political instability in which virtually all changes of government were the result of coups d'état of one kind or another. As a result of one of these coups, supported by young military officers and the MNR, Major Gualberto Villarroel became president in December 1943.

During the two and a half years of the Villarroel regime, the government strongly supported the miners' federation, which was led principally by the MNR. It also, for the first time, made overtures to the Indian peasants, sponsoring a peasant congress that was addressed by the president and enacting a measure outlawing the "personal service" that peasants owed to their landowners.

However, the Villarroel regime was overthrown in July 1946, and the president was lynched. Thereafter, for almost six years there was a succession of governments in power, which were closely associated with the so-called *Rosca*, that is, the large landholder and mining company interests, under which the labor movement suffered substantially. The overthrow of the last of those regimes marked the beginning of the Bolivian National Revolution.

Although the Bolivian National Revolution, which began on April 9, 1952, failed to achieve many of the objectives that its participants had set for it, such as establishing a solid basis for political and social democracy and the development of a diversified and prosperous national economy, its most fundamental achievement survived. This was the reversal of a more than 400-

year process of despoliation of the Indians, who made up the great majority of the country's inhabitants. The agrarian reform that was launched in 1952 gave back to the indigenous population possession of the land in the altiplano and the valleys leading from it, of which first the Spanish conquerors and subsequently their white and mestizo successors had deprived them.

Organized labor played a significant role in the agrarian reform process. Trade unionists—many of whom were themselves Indians—played a major part after April 1952 in organizing a powerful peasant movement as a preliminary step in carrying out the massive land redistribution process. Those peasant organizations became—and, to some extent, continued to be—an integral part of the organized labor movement.

Unfortunately, the revolutionary regime did not succeed in its effort to end the long tradition of military influence on, and domination of, national politics. Although at first it dismantled the army, which it had defeated in coming to power, the MNR government decided later to revive it and use it principally for economic projects such as road building. It later decided (under strong pressure from the U.S. government) to reestablish a full-fledged orthodox army. The result of that decision, finally, was that the military overthrew the revolutionary regime in November 1964 and for a quarter of a century thereafter made and unmade successive governments. Even after the soldiers "returned to the barracks" in the early 1980s, they remained the single most powerful factor in national politics.

However, the greatest weakness of the National Revolution—and of the Bolivian labor movement—was the nation's economy. For most of the twentieth century, the tin mining industry had provided most of the country's foreign exchange, as well as a large part of the government's finances. However, that industry was undergoing a long-run crisis, resulting from the exhaustion of many of the country's most important mines. The unstable prices of tin in the international market did not help this situation.

The problems of the mining industry and of the economy in general were of key importance to both the National Revolution and the labor movement. They largely prevented the revolutionary government—and its successors—from carrying out any large-scale economic development program and tended to generate extensive inflation.

Insofar as the labor movement was concerned, the problems of the mining industry were also of key significance. From the 1940s on, the miners' federation had been the single most important and most militant segment of organized labor. The crisis of the mining industry made it increasingly difficult to meet the de-

mands of the mine workers, tended to radicalize the miners' union leadership, and intensified the overall crisis in the national economy.

Because of both preexisting economic difficulties and the country's political instability, the Bolivian labor movement never enjoyed a period in which collective bargaining, as it functions in many other Latin American countries, became the accepted pattern of its relations with the employing class. The regular periodic negotiation of collective agreements, setting forth in more or less detail the framework within which the workers would be employed, with definition of the rights and obligations of both the workers and the employers, never became the rule in Bolivian labor relations. Although there were frequent negotiations over specific workers' demands, such as wage increases, and although strikes over these demands were also frequent, the institutionalization of detailed collective contacts became the infrequent exception rather than the customary basis of the unions' relations with their members' employers.

Bolivia's economic crisis reached its apogee in the early 1980s, when there was hyperinflation, and the government seemed almost unable to govern. At that point, Victor Paz Estenssoro, the first president of the National Revolution period, returned to office, this time with a "neoliberal" solution to the country's economic problems. After imposing a drastic national austerity program that curbed inflation, he put into practice equally drastic measures to deal with the crisis in the mining industry, closing down many of the exhausted mines and dismissing a majority of the sector's workers. Later governments continued on the neoliberal path first trod by Paz Estenssoro.

Although organized labor sought to defeat the neoliberal economic program, it failed, in large part because it did not present any feasible alternative to that program. That failure had a drastic impact on the labor movement, virtually destroying the power of the mine workers' organizations that had for almost half a century been the most formidable part of organized labor. As a consequence, labor's overall influence in the economy and polity was vastly diminished.

Bolivian organized labor was no more able than the labor movements elsewhere in Latin America (or elsewhere in the world, for that matter) to develop a program to confront the neoliberalism that swept not only Bolivia but much of the rest of the globe.

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## Bolivian Organized Labor before the Chaco War

Organized labor was largely a phenomenon of the twentieth century in Bolivia. However, during the middle decades of that century, Bolivia had one of the most influential and militant labor movements in the Western Hemisphere. The tardiness of its appearance was due to the underdeveloped nature of Bolivia's economy, and the militancy and power of organized labor were due in large degree to the revolution through which the country passed after 1952 and the labor movement's influence in the strategic tin mining industry, for long the axis of the country's economy. For a generation, the labor movement was a major force in the country's political and economic life.

### **COLONIAL AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY BOLIVIA**

Before the Spanish Conquest, Bolivia was part of the Inca Empire. However, even before it was invaded by the Incas, it had been the center of an earlier civilization, the physical remains of which are still to be found at Tiahuanaco, near the shores of Lake Titicaca. To this day, the Indians, who make up the majority of the population of Bolivia, are divided between the Quechua and Aymara, the descendants of the Incas and their predecessors, respectively.

With the coming of the Spanish conquerors, both Quechuas and Aymaras were subjected to a greater or lesser degree of servitude. Much of their land was converted into property of the individual conquistadores, and even that which remained part of Indian communities had to provide various kinds of tribute to the conquerors.

From the point of view of the Spanish Crown, the most important attribute of Bolivia was its rich veins of precious minerals, particularly silver. For several centuries these mines provided vast income not only to the Crown but to the Spaniards who enslaved the Indians who actually dug out the mineral. Potosí, the center of the silver mining region, became the largest city of the viceroyalty of Peru and one of the largest in all of Spain's American empire.

Under the Spaniards, Bolivia was called Upper Peru, and during most of the colonial period Upper Peru was part of the viceroyalty of Peru, but in 1776, with the establishment of the viceroyalty of the Rio de la Plata, Upper Peru was transferred to that new segment of the Spanish Empire.

Upper Peru received its independence when Simón Bolívar sent General Antonio José de Sucre there in 1825. Bolívar gave Bolivia, named after him, its first constitution, and Sucre became its first president. However, Sucre was soon overthrown, and for the next half century the country was ruled by a series of military dictators, most of whom came to power by revolting against their predecessors.

Throughout most of the nineteenth century, a major issue of contention was "free trade." What this meant in practice was ending the government's monopoly and allowing private sale abroad of silver, the nation's most important export product, while at the same time allowing free entry of manufactured goods from Europe and elsewhere, thus undermining the native artisan industries that had prospered during the colonial period.

The private mining interests widely formed partnerships and other arrangements with Chilean and particularly British investors. Also, during this period most of Bolivia's imports came from Great Britain.

Many of the caudillos who ruled during the first half century of independence favored free trade to a greater or lesser degree. The principal exception to this was Manuel Belzú, who ruled from 1843 to 1855 and enjoyed wide support from the artisans as well as from the Indians.<sup>1</sup>

With defeat of Bolivia by Chile in the War of the Pacific (1879-1881), there began a thirty-year period of civilian rule under the Partido Conservador (Conservative Party), which, in spite of its name, carried out a consistent free trade policy. That period ended with a revolution carried out by the opposition Liberal Party in 1899.

Meanwhile, Bolivia lost much of the territory that it had when it became independent. As a result of the War of the Pacific, it lost its coastal region, including the port of Antofagasta and its hinter-

land. A final peace treaty was signed between Bolivia and Chile only in 1904, when Bolivia recognized Chilean sovereignty over Bolivia's former territories on the Pacific coast, in return for which Chile promised to finance the construction of a railroad from Antofagasta to La Paz and another to the formerly Peruvian, but now Chilean, port of Arica.

In 1903, Bolivia also lost its eastern territory of Acre, a center of the booming rubber-gathering industry, when Brazilians who had moved into the area to collect rubber revolted, declaring the establishment of the "Republic of Acre," which promptly requested annexation to Brazil, which was "conceded" by the Brazilians. Bolivia finally ceded sovereignty over Acre to Brazil.

## **ORGANIZED LABOR IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**

Guillermo Lora began his discussion of the history of the Bolivian labor movement in 1848 with the advent to power of General Manuel Belzú. Belzú, who was a strong supporter of protection of the Bolivian artisan industry, also encouraged the organization of the artisans.

However, Lora argued that the organizations that Belzú fostered among the artisans had little in common with modern trade unions. Rather, he argued, they were an attempt to reinforce the guildlike organizations that had flourished to a greater or lesser degree during the Spanish colonial period.

To make this point, Lora looked in some detail at the associations of the carpenters and the tailors of La Paz. Those were clearly organizations of "master craftsmen," and neither journeymen wageworkers nor apprentices had any participation in them. One of the functions of these associations was to fortify the distinctions among master craftsmen, journeymen, and apprentices. They were certainly not organizations of wageworkers established to confront or deal with employers.<sup>2</sup>

Another characteristic of the artisans' organizations of the Belzú period and afterward was their close association with the government. This was understandable during the Belzú administration because of his strong support for protectionism for artisan industry. But Lora made the point that the artisan organizations had a tendency to support whatever government was in power.

Lora pointed out that the artisans had not only organizations of their own but also a very active press. Thus, newspapers and other periodicals appeared in all of the principal urban centers of Bolivia from the 1840s on. Most of them were of relatively short duration.<sup>3</sup>



Of a somewhat different nature and more clearly connected with the emergence of a modern labor movement were the mutual benefit societies that began to emerge in the last quarter of the nineteenth century in the country's principal urban centers. As elsewhere, these organizations were formed by workers to provide their members with help in case of illness and to aid family survivors in the case of death of members of the society. There was considerable competition between the Masons, on the one hand, and the Catholic Church (particularly the Jesuits), on the other, in organizing these early workers' groups. The mutualist movement continued through much of the twentieth century, although it was no longer the predominant element in the country's labor movement.<sup>4</sup>

Trifonio Delgado Gonzáles noted the spread of mutual benefit societies to most of the important cities and towns of the country. He also noted that some of the societies in the mining centers came under the control of the large tin companies. He said that these "were converted into instruments of oppression and servitude of the mining management, providing medical and hospital service to sick and injured miners, attempting in this way to form a kind of mutualist social assistance paid for by the workers themselves, which were certainly managed by the servants of the mining enterprises." These organizations were finally suppressed by the government of Hernando Siles in 1929.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, Guillermo Lora noted the existence in the nineteenth century of "socialist" organizations, drawing their inspiration largely from European Utopian Socialism. Some of these were launched by Argentine exiles, escaping from the tyranny of José Manuel de Rosas in the 1840s. The most important of these "socialist" organizations was the Club de Igualdad (Equality Club), led by Andrés Ibáñez, in the eastern provincial city of Santa Cruz. That group led a frustrated revolutionary attempt in 1875.<sup>6</sup>

## **POLITICAL EVOLUTION OF BOLIVIA BEFORE THE CHACO WAR**

The Liberal Party seized power through a revolution in 1899 and remained in power until it was ousted in another revolution in 1920. Under the Liberals, the political center of gravity moved from Sucre to La Paz.

In economic terms, the Liberal period was notable principally for the rapid rise of the mining of tin, which took the place of silver as the country's principal export. By the late 1920s, the tin mining industry was principally in the hands of three companies. The largest of these was that of Simón Patiño, a onetime store-

keeper. The second was that of the Aramayo family, which previously had been deeply involved in the mining of silver. The third company was the Hochschild enterprise, organized by an Austrian with Argentine citizenship.

All of the Big Three tin mining firms involved extensive foreign investment. The largest amount of this came from Great Britain, much of the rest coming from the United States. Bolivian tin was shipped to Great Britain for refining.

The Liberal Party in power quickly disillusioned many of those who had at first supported it. By the second decade of the twentieth century this disillusionment found expression in two opposition groups. The first was the Radical Party, which was headed by the poet and essayist Franz Tamayo and which had a working-class ally in the Liga Radical Obrera.

The second opposition group to arise during the Liberal era was the Partido Republicano, consisting of ex-Liberals as well as people who had supported the Conservative Party, which disappeared. Its principal leader was Bautista Saavedra, who became president with the overthrow of the Liberals.

Saavedra sometimes pictured himself as a "Socialist" and, in fact, enacted some of the country's early labor and social legislation. However, in the history of the labor movement he is principally remembered for the "Uncía Massacre" of 1922, in which troops fired upon demonstrating miners with devastating effect.

In the late 1920s, the president was Hernando Siles, a Republican who sought to organize his own Nationalist Party. Like Saavedra before him, he sought to win support among the country's workers, with some success.

Siles was overthrown by a coup in 1930. Two years later, the so-called Chaco War with Paraguay broke out, a three-year-long conflict in which Bolivia was defeated. During this conflict, the labor movement and political groups associated with it were pulverized by the government. That war marked a new phase in the history of Bolivia, particularly in the history of its labor movement.

## **THE LIBERAL ARTISANS**

At the time of their coming to power, the Liberals enjoyed the enthusiastic support of most of the country's artisans' organizations. The Liberal government encouraged the growth of these groups, out of which ultimately developed some of the nation's early trade unions.

Guillermo Lora paid particular attention to the Unión Gráfica Nacional, established in La Paz in 1905. He said, "From then on

the associated graphic workers will for a long time be the virtual leaders of the Bolivian labor movement."<sup>7</sup>

Although the Unión Gráfica Nacional was established by the proprietors of the small print shops that proliferated in La Paz, and their workers "only had a passive role in it,"<sup>8</sup> it did stimulate the feelings of solidarity among the city's printers. Similar groups were formed in Sucre and Cochabamba.<sup>9</sup>

By 1914, some of the wageworkers in the industry had established the Centro Tipográfico, which like the Unión Nacional was basically a mutual benefit society. Then two years later its place was taken by the Federación de Artes Gráficas. According to Lora, this group represented "the growth of the idea of building a resistance organization on a markedly mutualist basis."<sup>10</sup>

From its foundation until the Chaco War, the Federación de Artes Gráficas played a leading role in the country's labor movement. In 1929, it took the name Federación de Artes de Bolivia and was publishing a periodical, *El Obrero Gráfico*.<sup>11</sup> Its leaders would play a leading role in the revival of the labor movement after the Chaco War.

The most important Liberal-allied workers' group to be established was the Federación Obrera de La Paz, which sometimes called itself Federación Obrera Boliviana. It was established in April 1908 at a meeting of leaders of five mutual benefit groups, who set up a Provisional Organizing Committee. In November 1910, the Federación Obrera de La Paz was formally established and adopted its constitution. That document said that the organization's first objective was "[t]o unite all the artisans, protect them and aid them fraternally in the many fluctuations of life." Other objectives were to establish an arts and crafts school and "to work to make relations among the workers harmonious and subject to justice, equity and mutual protection."<sup>12</sup>

The Federación Obrera de la Paz was closely allied with the Liberals. Its "patron" was General Fermín Prudencio, the prefect of La Paz, and from time to time it named leading Liberal politicians as "honorary presidents" of the organizations.<sup>13</sup> Guillermo Lora noted, "The unconditional support of the Party of government resulted in the Federación Obrera de La Paz losing all combativity, and slowly, with the close contact with the advanced elements among the workers."<sup>14</sup> Although the federation continued to exist for a number of years, its place as the leading element in the labor movement was soon taken by another group.

The Federación Obrera de la Paz was the first Bolivian organization to establish the regular celebration of May Day. The first such celebration was in 1908. However, as Guillermo Lora noted,

it honored the day as a fiesta rather than as one of militancy and defiance.<sup>15</sup>

### **THE FEDERACIÓN OBRERA INTERNACIONAL AND FEDERACIÓN OBRERA DEL TRABAJO**

In the middle of 1914 a number of younger labor leaders launched a rival to the Federación Obrera de La Paz, to which they gave the name Federación Obrera Internacional (FOI). It is not clear exactly which workers' organizations affiliated with the new group. However, Guillermo Lora noted that "in the beginning it was the radical expression of the advanced artisans who had rebelled against the conservative and liberal character of the Federación Obrera de La Paz." He added, "The diffuse influence of socialist and anarchist currents, a mixture without clear definition and sometimes extremely capricious, provided reasons justifying that rebellion."<sup>16</sup>

The new federation issued its own periodical, *Defensa Obrera*, edited by Ezequiel Salvatierra, who for a generation was one of the principal Bolivian labor leaders. Although most of the groups belonging to the FOI were undoubtedly still mutual benefit societies, it put forth the idea that *sindicatos* were "the appropriate organization in the struggle against reaction and capitalism, and correctly maintained that it is the framework within which the unity of the class will be achieved."<sup>17</sup>

After the first flush of enthusiasm, the FOI seems to have gone into a period of recess. However, on July 13, 1918, it was reorganized. In that second phase it had within its ranks most of the labor organizations of La Paz, although notable among those that were not affiliated was the printing trades workers' federation.<sup>18</sup>

In its second phase, the Federación Obrera Internacional laid considerable emphasis on trying to achieve the passage of labor legislation, "adhering to the most modern scientific principles regarding the needs of present and future generations." Among the laws that it sought were the eight-hour day, workers' organization, and statutes "to protect the rights of infancy and old age, protecting them with dispositions of true humanity, as well as of the feminine sex, which are respected, and which consider her condition as a woman, in nature and in law."<sup>19</sup>

The FOI in its new dispensation also put considerable emphasis on the establishment of "popular universities," that is, adult education centers for workers. However, in contrast with similar proposals for such institutions, which date back to the middle of the nineteenth century, "the University proposed by the Interna-

tional had a marked political context, since it was an aspect of the effort to provide the exploited with their own party organization, capable of assuring the total liberation of the class."<sup>20</sup>

Lora noted that the FOI sought to form a class party putting forth Socialist doctrine. However, he said that "this socialism was very far from Marxism and was a curious mixture . . . of reformism and anarchism."<sup>21</sup>

Soon after its reestablishment, the FOI changed its name to Federación Obrera del Trabajo (FOT). It was to remain active until the Chaco War.

The organizations that were part of the FOT from the beginning included mutual benefit societies, unions and what might best be called a propaganda group, the Centro Obrero de Estudios Sociales, which Lora called "the truce directing grain" of the FOT. The workers' organizations in the FOT included, among others, those of hotel employees, electricians, trolley car workers, chauffeurs, carpenters, tailors, mechanics, and the local branch of the Federación Ferroviaria (railroad workers).<sup>22</sup> Although the Federación Ferroviaria, as such, and the printing trades workers did not belong to the FOT, they were considered its "allies."<sup>23</sup>

From its inception, the FOT was closely linked with the Socialist Party, which had recently been established in La Paz. The federation's orientation was broadly stated in the "Organic Statute" of the FOT. It said:

The Federación Obrera del Trabajo is the only central body of the trade union organizations of the departmental proletariat and is constituted by the unions of workshop and industry, peasant organizations, school teachers and popular universities and intellectuals, waged workers of the city, of the provinces and mining centers which have as their class purpose the defense of their economic, social, professional interests and the constant and permanent intellectual, moral and physical improvement of their members, to achieve the fulfillment of the aspirations for integral disciplined organization and emancipation.<sup>24</sup>

In the mid-1920s there was a marked slackening of activity on the part of the FOT. Lora commented, "The Federación Obrera del Trabajo presents us with a fundamental contradiction: the proletarian sectors joined slowly and systematically the trade union movement, but the leadership continued to be in the hands of artisans. . . . This was one of the causes of the organizational slackening, of the predominance of horizontal unions and even of the easy corruption of the leaders."<sup>25</sup>

## LABOR FEDERATIONS OF OTHER URBAN CENTERS

Labor federations appeared in a number of the other urban centers of Bolivia. In Oruro there was established a Federación Obrera del Trabajo in May 1919. It was made up of "all of the federations of industry, societies of mutual aid, art, similar professions and all the workers' associations 'that freely desire to join it. Its establishment does not have any determined political character and does not have profit-seeking motives.' "<sup>26</sup>

This federation aspired to become nationwide and, in fact, claimed to have affiliates in various other cities and towns, although it never went much beyond Oruro. It was affiliated for a while with the International Federation of Trade Unions, which had its headquarters in Amsterdam. It proclaimed as one of its objectives "to sign contracts in representation of the workers with owners and managers of enterprises, factories, workshops, entrepreneurs."<sup>27</sup>

There also existed in Oruro for a short while in the early 1920s a miners' federation. Although it was, in effect, destroyed in 1922, the FOT of Oruro sought to keep it in existence. It also sought to help refugees who fled from Uncía, after the "massacre" there in 1922.<sup>28</sup>

In Cochabamba there was established in 1918 the Federación Obrera Central. It continued in existence until 1932. It was closely associated with the local Socialist Party, which succeeded in electing a few members of the city council. It issued a periodical, *Claridad*, which appeared for a number of years. This was followed by *El Federado*, launched in 1922 and suppressed by the authorities a year later. In 1928 a new periodical, *El Proletario*, was published by the Cochabamba federation.

In 1929, the organizations affiliated with the Cochabamba federation included the light and power workers, construction workers, tailors, carpenters, and printing trades workers. There were also a Club Social Obrera and a Federation of Newsboys, which belonged to the organization.

Guillermo Lora noted with regard to the Cochabamba federation:

This labor central went through periods of depression and frank organizational crisis, during which the unions passed through a period of exhaustion. A periodical of the period tells us that in 1926 there was not a single labor organization alive. It was necessary for Víctor Rufino Moya Quiroga, who acted for the recently established Imprenta López, to work toward reanimating the unions. The first to reorganize was the Unión Gráfica, which on November 12, 1929 carried out a strike for better economic conditions.<sup>29</sup>

Although he admittedly did not comment on all of the labor federations of the pre-Chaco War period, Guillermo Lora did note a few others. In Corocoro there existed the Federation of Miners and Workers (*Federación de Mineros y Obreros*). In Uyuni, there existed in 1920 a *Federación Obrera*, which worked closely with the local *Partido Obrero Socialista*. He also noted that "in other mining centers there were also Federations, but often they were nothing more than organizations of workers of a single enterprise." Finally, Lora noted that there existed for some time a FOT in Sucre, which was "reorganized" in 1929.<sup>30</sup>

### THE STUDENT FEDERATION

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the emerging labor movement frequently had close connections with the student movement that was developing at the same time. It is therefore important to note the nature and evolution of the university student movement.

The first national congress of university students took place in Potosí in July 1908, on the invitation of the University Center of that city. Attended by delegates from universities in Sucre, La Paz, Santa Cruz, Tarija, Potosí Cochabamba, and Oruro, it stressed particularly the importance of extending education to the country's workers and peasants. It was also notably anticlerical in sentiment. This meeting decided to establish the *Liga Universitaria Nacional*.<sup>31</sup>

A second university students' congress took place in Sucre in 1908, with delegates from the universities of Chuquisaca, La Paz, Cochabamba, Santa Cruz, Potosí, Oruro, and Beni. It passed resolutions favoring separation of church and state and in favor of proportional representation in elections. Guillermo Lora noted, "Socialism made its presence known through the Potosí delegate Abstoller, who attacked the regime of private property, although his proposals did not gain majority support."<sup>32</sup>

There was then an almost twenty-year hiatus in national student organization. The initiative to reestablish a national student movement was taken by the *Federación de Estudiantes de Cochabamba*, which was established in 1925. It included in its leadership a number of people who were in later years to have "enormous influence in the labor movement." These included José Antonio Arze, Ricardo Anaya, E. Arce Loureiro, and José Aguirre Gainsborg.<sup>33</sup>

As a result of the invitation of the Cochabamba student group, the National Convention of Students met in that city in August 1928 and established the *Federación Universitaria Bolivi-*

ana (FUB). All of the country's universities were represented at the convention. The statement of principles of the new federation, drawn up by José Antonio Arze and Ricardo Anaya, stated: "The university youth of Bolivia do not remain unaware of the profound commotions from which the present social organization suffers. . . . The university youth do not hesitate to declare that they place themselves against reaction, joining the cause of the free youth, the conscious proletariat and the impartial and high-minded things of the whole world."<sup>34</sup>

In the following year, the FUB held what it called the Second Congress of Students in Sucre. According to one journalist of the time, this meeting was of a "markedly extremist character." Guillermo Lora commented that "during this period the University was the focus from which Marxism irradiated and the more advanced students were sure that their destiny was none other than to lead the rising masses."<sup>35</sup>

The Chaco War disrupted the life of the FUB as it did that of the labor movement. However, the federación was reestablished after the war. What it called the Fourth Convention of Students met in December 1938 in Sucre. There it adopted a Statement of Principles drawn up by Ernesto Ayala Mercado, then a member of the new Trotskyist party, the Partido Obrero Revolucionario. The meeting was also notable for the presence in it of fraternal delegates from the new labor confederation, the Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores de Bolivia (CSTB), as well as from the national teachers' organization, the Magisterio Nacional.

At this Fourth Convention of Students, the FUB, the CSTB and the teachers' organization signed an agreement. It said, among other things: "The undersigned organizations, with an eminently socialist consciousness, promise to struggle at all times for the demands of the workers for total emancipation of the exploited and oppressed of Bolivia; to establish a front of defence against the invasion of imperialism in all of its manifestations, and to work for, among the immediate objectives, the realization of democratic liberties."<sup>36</sup>

## EARLY SOCIALIST ORGANIZATIONS

As we have seen, the nascent labor movement of the first decade of the twentieth century was largely under the influence of the Liberal Party, recently come to power. However, increasingly there was a tendency on the part of the organized workers to free themselves from the existing parties and to undertake independent political activity. This tendency tended to speak in "socialist" terms, although there were conflicting interpretations of the



meaning of "socialist." The debate on these matters took place in organizations that were ancillary to the labor movement as well as within the labor groups themselves.

The oldest of the organizations proclaiming their adherence to Socialism was the Sociedad Agustín Aspiazu, which was established as early as 1904. Guillermo Lora said of this group that it "sought to bring together all of the restless and advanced intellectuals" and that "it was, really, a propagandistic nucleus which, to fulfill its mission, approached the advanced elements among the workers, using the meeting, the harangue and the pamphlet. The boldest of their members showed signs of having read socialist propaganda."<sup>37</sup>

The most widely distributed publications of the group were the so-called Hojas de Propaganda (Propaganda Leaflets), in which they put forward their ideas on a wide range of subjects. Lora noted that these and other publications of the organization showed that "the militants of the Sociedad Agustín Aspiazu were, less by temperament than by necessity, passionate polemicists. Their writings not only spoke in generalities but reflected the path followed by socialist propaganda."<sup>38</sup>

Lora mentioned, among other leading figures in the Sociedad, Agustín Aspiazu, Miguel Lino Urquieta, a Peruvian whom he calls "the great animator" of the organization, and a young Bolivian, Tomás Monje Gutiérrez, who many years later would be provisional president of Bolivia after the overthrow of the government of President Gualberto Villarroel in July 1946.

Monje Gutiérrez proclaimed himself an adherent of scientific socialism. He wrote that the capitalist system had to be abolished, that "convinced of this truth and of the deviant evolution through which capitalism oppresses humanity, our primordial effort is directed toward extirpating it, so as to extinguish economic privileges."

To this end, Monje Gutiérrez advocated "nothing less than the application of scientific socialism that opens the way for the 'the struggle for equality.' " However, he conceded that this was a struggle that would last a long time.<sup>39</sup>

More important in its longer-run consequences than the Sociedad Agustín Aspiazu was the Centro Obrero de Estudios Sociales. Established in 1914 in La Paz, it was, according to Lora, "the first Marxist organization of great importance within the labor movement. . . . Having begun with a concentration of elements inspired by socialist reformism and by anarchism, it evolved slowly toward Marxism. Its confessed intention was none other than building the socialist party and promoting and intensifying the organization of unions." It ultimately governed "from

social democratic positions to those sustained by the Communist International. Its most outstanding figure was Ricardo Perales, who had been a leader of the tailors' organization of Oruro, as well as a lawyer.<sup>40</sup> It included within its ranks some of the principal labor leaders of La Paz.<sup>41</sup>

Although the Centro aspired to become a nationwide organization, it was largely confined, at least in its early years, to La Paz. There it was formally part of the Federación Obrera del Trabajo. Only in Tarija, quite a few years later, was another Centro Obrero de Estudios Sociales established.<sup>42</sup>

The objective of the Centro Obrero de Estudios Sociales was to launch a Socialist Party as an independent party of the workers, who still were inclined to vote for one or another of the old parties, which, in the last analysis, were controlled by the *Rosca* (popular name for the ruling landlord-mining company elite). Some preliminary efforts in that direction had already occurred in 1913 and 1914.

In Potosí a small group of students and workers formed a Partido Socialista in 1913. The founders of this group got most of their ideas from books that were then coming to Bolivia, particularly from Argentina and Spain. This Partido Socialista, which had about 200 members, had contact with the Argentine Socialist Party, and a continuing correspondence for some time with the Argentine Socialist leader Alfredo Palacios. It organized one of the country's first May Day demonstrations in 1913 and helped establish several trade unions, including a miners' organization. The group was much persecuted by the authorities and lasted only about three years. Its principal leader and secretary was Lucio Mendivil, who many years later would become the country's first (and only) Trotskyist senator.<sup>43</sup>

In La Paz, the Federación Obrera also had established a Socialist Party, in 1914. Its most outstanding leader was Ezequiel Salvatierra. In elections of that year, the party won two seats in the municipal council and one in the Chamber of Deputies. In 1916, it ran a university professor, Zenón Saavedra, for congress. Guillermo Lora said that this party's "program of government was much more radical than the socialist proposals that would appear later. For the first time, they spoke of revolutionary action on an international and particularly continental scale. This party 'blew away' after a few short years."<sup>44</sup>

In 1919 and 1920 Socialist parties were established in various Bolivian cities. The Centro Obrero de Estudios Sociales greeted this movement with great enthusiasm. In a "Manifiesto . . . to the Workers of Bolivia," published on December 31, 1919, it wrote:

The duty of solidarity and frank comradeship impels us to launch this manifesto, concerning the latest political events in Tarija, Uyuni, Cochabamba, Potosí, Sucre and Oruro [localities in which Partidos Socialistas were founded]. . . . In Oruro, a little while ago a group of men with great audacity, serenity and great love for their fellows, founded the Partido Socialista, at the head of which is that man of total dignity, total enthusiasm, total fire for workers' rights, Ricardo Perales.

The objective was to organize a Socialist Party in all of the country's cities, and then establish such a group on a national scale.<sup>45</sup>

In September 1920, the Centro patronized the establishment in La Paz of the Partido Obrero Socialista "after a great assembly of distinguished working-class elements." Julio M. Ordoñez was named its secretary-general, and it launched the electoral candidacy of another labor leader, Augusto Varela.<sup>46</sup> We have no further information concerning the fate of that candidacy.

In 1921, at a meeting in Oruro, there was an effort made to merge the various regional Socialist parties into a national organization. There were representatives from local parties in La Paz, Oruro, Uyuni, Cochabamba, Potosí, Sucre, and several other cities. In part, it reflected the modest electoral success that those parties had achieved. Among the people attending were Ricardo Soruco, a member of the Chamber of Deputies elected largely through the efforts of the railroad workers; Augusto Varela, alternate deputy for La Paz and secretary general of the Socialist Party in that city; and Ricardo Perales, alternate deputy for Oruro and secretary-general of the Socialist Party in that city.

This effort to unite all of the country's Socialist parties was not successful. As Lora noted, "[V]ery quickly there reappeared the many Socialist Workers Parties."<sup>47</sup>

In La Paz during the late 1920s two other efforts were made to establish parties based on the labor movement. In July 1927, Ezequiel Salvatierra again took the leadership in establishing the Partido Obrero. Its immediate purpose was to run candidates in the municipal elections of December of that year. Salvatierra and three others ran. We have no indication as to whether any of the labor candidates were elected, but Guillermo Lora noted that "after the electoral campaign the Partido Obrero practically disappeared from the political scene."<sup>48</sup>

However, shortly afterward another party, the Partido Laborista, was established in La Paz. It participated in the municipal

elections of December 1928, in which it ran seven nominees. The leader of the underground Communist Party, Carlos Mendóza Mamani, played a leading role in this group. However, like its predecessors, the Partido Laborista soon disappeared.<sup>49</sup>

The last labor party to appear in La Paz was a new Partido Socialista, formed on December 31, 1930. There developed a quarrel between pro-Communist elements and their opponents within this organization. The pro-Communists were expelled. However, this new Socialist party was destroyed with the onslaught of the Chaco War.<sup>50</sup>

Finally, mention should be made of the Partido Socialista Revolucionario. Formed in 1929, this party, unlike the others we have been discussing, was illegal. However, it carried on a vigorous campaign against the Siles government and against the threat of war with Paraguay. Lora noted, "We underscore . . . that the Partido Socialista Revolucionario of Bolivia maintained with clarity the need for a revolution directed by the working class, with the objective of creating a dictatorship of the proletariat."<sup>51</sup> He gave no indication of who the leaders of this party were and what connection it had with the then-existing trade union organizations.

## THE TRISTÁN MAROF LEGEND

Finally, among those who sought to establish a Socialist party in Bolivia before the Chaco War, mention must be made of Tristán Marof. His real name was Gustavo Navarro, and in his youth he was a member of the Republican Party and took part in the revolution of 1920 that put Bautista Saavedra, the Republican leader, in the presidency.

After the 1920 revolution, Gustavo Navarro was named a Bolivian diplomatic representative in Europe, serving as consul in Genoa and then in Paris. In Europe he developed a strong sympathy for the Marxist revolutionary movement, as a result of which he wrote his first book, *El Ingenuo Continente Americano*. However, since he was a diplomat, he could not use his own name, so he adopted that of Tristán Marof, Marof being, he insisted, a Bulgarian name, not a Russian one. Tristán was a good Spanish name. It was as Tristán Marof that he became famous in Bolivia and outside the country.

In 1926, Marof returned home and set about establishing a Socialist Party. As he said many years later, that party was not affiliated with the Comintern but "did have considerable sympathy for Russia." The party was severely persecuted by the government of

the time, and in 1928, Tristán Marof was forced into exile, where he stayed until after the end of the Chaco War.<sup>52</sup>

Guillermo Lora, who was never a supporter of Marof, wrote about him:

Rather than an ideologist or political leader . . . Marof was a *symbol* of Bolivian socialism. His legend, rather than the things he wrote, swept the whole nation and fed the hopes of the oppressed. The power of his symbol was created in part by the press campaign against him, and in part by the desperate search of the people for a leader. Both before and after the Chaco War everybody automatically regarded Marof as the leader in his own right. Those who thought like this included simple townspeople who belonged to no political party but wanted profound social changes, those who regarded themselves as Stalinists, and also the anti-bureaucratic socialists, and even the anarchists. Apart from Marof there is surely no one else in the whole of Bolivia's history on whom such distinct political tendencies and social classes have rested their hopes. There was not a workers' or students' congress that failed to invoke the name of the globetrotting, persecuted politician, or to pass votes of solidarity with the "leader of the exploited."<sup>53</sup>

## **MINERS' ORGANIZATIONS**

Guillermo Lora presents evidence that as early as 1904 there began to be some organization among the tin miners. In the Huanchaca Company in Pulacayo, the firm's French manager proposed to increase the workers' wages but was forbidden to do so by the local police chief. When the workers heard of this, after first demonstrating in front of the manager, they went into town to deal with the police chief and his assistant, who were able to escape the wrath of the workers. There were no wage increases.<sup>54</sup>

However, it was not until the closing months of World War I that it is clear that the workers of the mines generally began to organize and make demands on their employers. In July 1918, the workers in the La Salvadora mine of Simon Patiño near the town of Uncía in the Department of Potosí demonstrated against delayed payment of their wages, but their demonstration was "violently repressed." This angered the workers, who sacked the company stores near the mine, whereupon a "white guard" was organized by the company manager, Máximo Nava, and was armed with the pistols and carbines. They were met by miners using dynamite as their principal weapon. The conflict lasted two days and was suppressed only when the government sent in infantry troops to support the company. There were sizable casualties among the workers.<sup>55</sup>

In 1918 there were also demonstrations and a strike in Patiño mines near Pulacayo in Potosí Department. In this instance, the workers were protesting against the employment of seventeen Chilean workers. The strike was successful in that the Chilean workers were dismissed.

In 1921 there was another miners' strike in Pulacayo, this time over the issue of the company's trying to force small merchants out of the mining area so as to give a commercial monopoly to the Portillo Company. Again the miners went on strike, demonstrated in front of the administration building, and threatened to use dynamite to win their argument. The administration backed down.<sup>56</sup>

However, the most famous mine workers' strike in the early 1920s took place in Uncía in June 1923. A massacre of workers took place at that time, which assumed great symbolic importance for the Bolivian labor movement.

On May 1, 1923, there was a large May Day demonstration in Uncía, ending in the formal establishment of the Federación Obrera Central Uncía (FOCU), composed of "workers of the region who are tired of supporting the yoke of the capitalists, and very specially of Emilio Díaz, manager of the Compañía Estanifera Llallagua." The new federation had "subcouncils" in both that Chilean-owned company and the neighboring La Salvadora mine belonging to Patiño.<sup>57</sup>

A conflict soon arose between the new federation and the mine owners and the government over union recognition. The federation sent a four-man delegation to La Paz, with a list of demands for which it sought government support. These demands included expulsion from the country of the Chilean manager of the Compañía Estanifera Llallagua, dismissal of some of the company policeman, reinstatement of seven workers who had been fired from the tin processing plant in Catavi, free entry into the mining camps of the Llallagua Company for all members of the federation, "and full guarantees for them." The federation also demanded "[r]ecognition of the Federación Obrera Central of Uncía and its federal sub-councils by the La Salvadora and Llallagua companies" and "full guarantees" for the federation's Catavi sub-council, while it gave assurances to the government of the "guarantees and respect" offered to the two companies by the federation, and the delegation finally wanted "to protest in the name of the FOCU against the calumnious and self-interested imputation that it was motivated by political interests."<sup>58</sup>

Meanwhile, the FOCU contacted other Bolivian labor groups to try to get support for a general strike if the firms involved refused to recognize the federation. When the government indicated

its support of most of the things that had been demanded by the union, the federation began preparation for a strike if the companies did not conform to the government's decision.

However, faced with the possibility of a general strike in support of the Uncía miners, the government of Bautista Saavedra declared a state of siege and sent four army units to Uncía. Then, on June 4, the military commander in Uncía, Lieutenant Colonel Villegas, invited the federation's president, Guillermo Gamarra, to come to the local police headquarters to meet with company representatives to settle the conflict. But when he got there, he and some other union people were put under arrest.

The retention of their leaders aroused the fury of the miners, who had gathered in the center of Uncía. They demanded loudly that their leaders be released. The efforts of Gamarra and another union leader to get the crowd to break up were unheeded.

One of the troop commanders, Major Ayoroa, then ordered his soldiers to fire on the demonstrators. According to a union report made after the tragedy, the soldiers refused to do so, whereupon Major Ayoroa himself seized a machine gun and fired into the crowd, killing at least four people and seriously wounding a dozen more.

On the following day, some 6,000 workers in Uncía and Catavi went on strike, but the walkout failed, and "the young Federación Obrera Central de Uncía was totally destroyed."<sup>59</sup>

The "massacre of Uncía" came to have great symbolic importance for the Bolivian labor movement. Like the "massacre of Iquique" in Chile, it was never forgotten and came to symbolize both the oppression to which the workers were subject and their valor in resisting that oppression.

## **RAILROAD WORKERS' ORGANIZATION**

Another area in which unions developed by the third decade of the twentieth century, and where they were to play a major role in the Bolivian labor movement, was that of the railroaders. By the end of World War I, railways had been built connecting most of the country's major urban centers, La Paz, Sucre, Oruro, Potosí, and Cochabamba. There were also railroads connecting La Paz with the onetime Bolivian (but now Chilean) port of Antofagasta and with Arica, the formerly Peruvian port that also now belonged to Chile. Finally, there was a road from La Paz to Guaguí, on Lake Titicaca.

The first railroad workers' union was apparently established in 1912 by workers in Mollini, on the Oruro-Cochabamba line. In that same year, railroad workers at the mining town of Uyuni es-

tablished a mutual benefit society, "with objectives of social revindication."<sup>60</sup>

However, it was not until August 1919 that a group aspiring to be a national railroaders' organization was established. In that month a group of 182 workers of the British-owned Bolivian Railway Company (between La Paz and Antofagasta) and of the La Paz-Guagui road established the Liga de Empleados y Obreros de Ferrocarriles, headed by Hector Borda of the Bolivian Railway. It aspired to bring into its ranks the workers of all of the country's railroads, and before long it did have local groups in most of them.

The Liga put emphasis on mutual benefit activities and on seeking to get government to pass labor and social legislation. However, it also promoted the establishment of a strike fund to be used if the workers on any of the railroads had to walk out.

As a matter of fact, only about two months after the Liga was established, there was a strike on the Ferrocarril Guaqui, and the Liga raised money to support the strikers. The walkout was quickly victorious. Perhaps as a result of this, shortly afterward there were some local strikes.

In less than a year, the Liga de Empleados y Obreros de Ferrocarriles suffered a fatal split. This arose as a result of a strike on the Chilean part of the Bolivian Railway, which provoked the members of the Liga employed on the Bolivian Railway to demand that the strike funds that the Liga had accumulated be used to help the Chilean strikers. The leader of the Liga refused this demand, whereupon the Liga members on the Bolivian Railway withdrew to form the Federación Ferroviaria. This took place at a meeting in Oruro on March 6, 1920.

Even before the separation of the Bolivian Railway workers from the Liga de Empleados y Obreros de Ferrocarriles, they had presented a list of demands to the company. According to Guillermo Lora, "the unionists achieved many valuable concessions. However, the union subsequently protested that the company had failed to carry out many of the things to which it had agreed."

In December 1920 the Federación held its "First Convention." There were eighty delegates from various parts of the Bolivian Railway. In the following year it sponsored a general labor congress, although this did not give rise to any new organization.

However, the most spectacular activity of the Federación Ferroviaria in its early years was the general strike it declared in January 1921. This was a very peculiar strike in terms of its objectives.

Ricardo Soruco had been elected to parliament largely due to the support of railroad workers. Late in 1920 he was strongly at-



tacked in parliament by Abel Iturralde, a strongly Catholic deputy, and another deputy threatened to "shoot" Soruco. The Federación Ferroviaria took this as an insult and demanded a retraction from the deputies involved. When such apologies were not offered, the federación declared a general strike on January 15, 1921. It was finally settled on January 21 "as the result of an agreement signed between the railroad workers and President Saavedra."<sup>61</sup>

One other railroad workers' group in the early 1920s was the Federación Obrera (Sección Boliviana). It consisted of Bolivian workers employed on the La Paz-Arica Railroad and was established in 1920. At the end of that year it supported a strike by the workers on the Chilean end of the line. It was not very successful in rallying support for that strike among other Bolivian workers' groups.<sup>62</sup>

### **ATTEMPTS TO ORGANIZE A NATIONAL LABOR CONFEDERATION IN THE 1920s**

Several attempts were made during the decade before the Chaco War to establish a national labor confederation. These bore relatively little fruit.

The first such took place in Oruro in 1921, when a congress met on the invitation of the Federación Ferroviaria. There were delegates present from the railroaders, trolley car workers, miners, printing trades, commercial employees, and various artisan groups. However, the stated objective of the meeting—to establish a national labor confederation—was not achieved, due largely to controversies between workers sympathetic to the new Republican Party and delegates from unions with more radical political leadership.<sup>63</sup>

The second attempt to establish a national organization, which proclaimed itself the National Congress of Workers, was called together on the inspiration of the Marxist-oriented Congreso Obrero de Estudios, although the invitations to the meeting were issued by the Universidad Popular of La Paz. Its most notable figure was Carlos Méndez Mamani, who was soon to become the Communist International's principal contact in Bolivia.

This second national meeting took place in La Paz in August 1925. It decided to establish the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, and much of the congress' time was taken up with discussing how that group would be organized. Among the other decisions was a resolution that it would remain independent of, but maintain friendly relations with, the Communists' Red International of Labor Unions, the Socialist-inclined International

Federation of Trade Union, and the anarchosyndicalist International Workingmen's Association.

There was a mixed group of unions, mutual benefit societies, and workers' cultural groups represented at this meeting. Both pro-anarchist and pro-Communist groups were represented, although the credentials of a representative of the Catholic Workers Circle of Potosí were rejected.<sup>64</sup>

The Confederación Nacional del Trabajo proved to be stillborn. However, in March 1927 a Third Labor Congress was held in Oruro. This congress met in the Municipal Theater of Oruro, with 150 delegates present, including twenty peasants. It was addressed by a cabinet member representing President Hernando Siles.

The Third Congress, like the one two years earlier, was presided over by Romando Chumcero. It was more clearly Marxist-oriented than the meeting in La Paz had been. It reconfirmed the decision to establish the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, which was also referred to as the Confederación Boliviana del Proletario and the Confederación Boliviana del Trabajo. It decided that the headquarters should be in Oruro and elaborated plans to establish federations in each of the departments of the republic. As had been the case two years before, this meeting demanded the enactment of a number of pieces of labor and social legislation.<sup>65</sup>

Once again, the efforts to establish a functioning national labor confederation proved fruitless. Because of governmental hostility, internal dissidence, and lack of sufficient financial resources, the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) did not prove to be a reality.

As a consequence of all of this, a National Labor Conference was summoned in Potosí in March 1929. However, it was attended only by delegates from the Reorganizing Committee of the Federación Obrera de Potosí and the Federaciones Obreras del Trabajo of Sucre and La Paz. Two issues predominated in this meeting: the approaching danger of war with Paraguay and the ineffectiveness of the central labor body. However, among its decisions was one to affiliate the CNT with the Red International of Labor Unions (RILU) and to name a delegate, Carlos Mendóza Mamani, to the Latin American regional congress of the RILU that was to meet shortly in Montevideo.

The "legality" of this National Labor Conference was hotly contested by important elements of the labor movement. Among others, the Federación Obrera del Trabajo of La Paz specifically repudiated it and "declared in recess" the CNT.<sup>66</sup>

Guillermo Lora noted, "The Marxists who were at the head of the supposed Confederación Boliviana del Trabajo demonstrated that they did not have sufficient capacity to resolve the daily problems of the workers. The errors culminated in the arbitrary holding of the National Conference of Potosí; in this way the anarchists had the doors opened to carry out a rude coup against the Marxist national leadership."<sup>67</sup>

This "coup" culminated in the Fourth Labor Congress in Oruro in August 1930. The initiative for this meeting came from the Federación Obrera Local, an anarchist-controlled organization in La Paz that had been established three years before. It was seconded by anarchist unionists in Oruro, who seized control of the headquarters of the confederación that was based there and named a Provisional Central Council, headed by Gabriel Moisés and Luis Gallard.<sup>68</sup>

The Fourth Congress was completely dominated by the anarchists, and the Marxist-oriented delegates withdrew. The congress rechristened the confederation the Confederación Obrera Regional Boliviana (CORB), adopted the organizational pattern of the Federación Obrera Regional Argentina (FORA), and voted to affiliate with the International Workingmen's Association. It denounced the threat of war with Paraguay and urged young men to evade military conscription.<sup>69</sup>

However, this effort to establish a functioning national central labor organization was no more successful than the others had been. The government soon arrested most of the leaders of the CORB and decimated the organization. A year and a half later, with the onset of the Chaco War, the government ordered the workers to "cease all union activity."<sup>70</sup>

## THE COMMUNISTS

Clearly, by the late 1920s, the leadership of the more militant parts of the Bolivian labor movement was divided between a pro-Communist element and anarchist-controlled groups. But there was also a part of the labor leadership that sympathized with the various governments of the 1920s. We shall look at each of these political tendencies in Bolivian organized labor.

We have seen that the Socialist parties that arose after 1913 in various parts of the country usually had somewhat undefined ideologies. However, as time went on, the ideas associated with the Bolshevik Revolution and the Communist International to which it gave rise gained growing support among those Bolivians who proclaimed themselves to be Socialists. This had an impact on the organized labor movement.

One evidence of this growing "pro-Bolshevik" tendency was the appearance in June 1926 of a new weekly periodical in La Paz, *Bandera Roja*, edited by Carlos Mendóza Mamani and four other people associated with the labor movement, which lasted for about a year. Guillermo Lora said that "*Bandera Roja* can be considered as the first periodical that shows evidence of the influence of the Third International."<sup>71</sup> He also said, "For the Communist International, one of the jobs of *Bandera Roja* was to cooperate in the formation of the Communist Party in Bolivia; however, our Marxists resisted using such a clear formula and at no moment did they launch that slogan in integral terms."<sup>72</sup> At one point, the weekly was declared the official organ of the Federación Obrera del Trabajo of La Paz.<sup>73</sup>

The Communist International, particularly its South American Bureau with headquarters in Montevideo, became increasingly interested in seeing the establishment of a Communist Party in Bolivia. As a consequence, Bolivians participated in various Latin American Communist meetings. Thus, Carlos Mendóza Mamani, whom Lora categorized as "the first person responsible for Communist work in Bolivia," attended the meeting in Montevideo that established the Communist-controlled labor group, the Confederación Sindical Latino Americana (CSLA), as well as participating in a Latin American "antiwar congress."<sup>74</sup>

Three Bolivians also attended the South American Congress of Communist Parties in Buenos Aires, shortly after the founding of the CSLA. These were Carlos Mendóza Mamani, Alfredo Suazo, and José Antonio Arze, who some years later was to organize the Stalinist "front party," the Partido de la Izquierda Revolucionaria.<sup>75</sup>

In 1928, the South American Buro of the Comintern indicated to its supporters in Bolivia that they should establish a Communist Party even if, given the circumstances there, it had to be a clandestine organization. Until then, supporters of the Comintern had been scattered in a number of the other Bolivian parties. Their ranks included both intellectuals and union leaders. Carlos Mendóza Mamani undertook the task of bringing them together in a Communist Party.<sup>76</sup>

Of the underground party that was established in Bolivia, Guillermo Lora said, "The clandestine Communist Party was not a party in the strict sense of the word. It was, rather, a reduced circle of friends who, to give the impression of being strongly organized, presented itself as an Executive Committee." He said that the underground party counted particularly on the prestige of some of its members to gain influence among the workers and

in the unions. It apparently made no effort to organize party cells in the various labor organizations.

Lora said that "most of its efforts were spent in trying to quietly and indirectly capture trade union leadership and to maintain correspondence with persecuted workers." To this end, it claimed to have established an Aid Committee, to provide help to jailed labor leaders, although the party itself noted, "Unfortunately, this Committee has worked very little, due to lack of experience on the part of the comrades who belong to it."

Lora also noted, "The clandestine Communist Party was practically destroyed by police oppression. Its most distinguished elements who agitated the situation, particularly the trade union leaders who did it openly, were immediately jailed or exiled. The Communist Party, with its leadership decapitated, entered into a period of frank crisis."<sup>77</sup>

## THE ANARCHISTS

The principal challenge to the growing influence of the Marxists-Leninists in the Bolivian labor movement during the 1920s came from the anarchists. In the early 1920s there appeared, particularly in La Paz, various cultural organizations of predominantly anarchist orientation, although some Marxists also participated in them. These groups issued publications of short duration. Guillermo Lora noted the important influence of foreigners from Argentina, Peru, Chile, and Spain in these early anarchist groups.<sup>78</sup>

However, it was in 1926 that the anarchists once again began to become an important element in the organized labor movement. In that year, they established the Federación Obrera Local (FOL) in La Paz as a rival to the existing Federación Obrera del Trabajo, which was under Marxist influence. Although the FOL aspired to become a national organization, the only other city in which the anarchists became predominant was Oruro. Elsewhere, they functioned as an opposition group within other labor organizations. The FOL published first *La Humanidad* and then *Tierra y Libertad* as its organs.

The FOL was the majority union group in La Paz until the Chaco War. It claimed to have thirty-eight unions affiliated with it. These included organizations of woodworkers, construction workers, tailors, and workers in the local match factory, as well as unions in the local box factory and the Said Company, the city's largest textile plant. The cultural group Despertar also belonged to the FOL.

According to Guillermo Lora, the most important contribution of the FOL in the years before the Chaco War was its struggle for the eight-hour day. Its affiliates had a number of successes in this effort.<sup>79</sup>

Lora noted that the most outstanding figure in the FOL in the years before the Chaco War was Luciano Vertíz Blando. He served first as recording secretary and then as general secretary of the federation.<sup>80</sup>

A unique feature of the anarchist labor movement in La Paz was the Federación Obrera Femenina. Established in April 1927, it grouped together particularly the market women of the city. Its affiliates included unions of cooks, workers in the flower markets, various types of women in the Camacho Lanza and Locería markets, meat market employees, and milk distributors.<sup>81</sup> This federation was to remain a key element in the anarchist labor movement so long as it survived and in its later years was to provide much of the leadership for that movement.

The second center of anarchist strength in the labor movement was the city of Oruro. The Federación Obrera del Trabajo there had become inactive by 1930. Local anarchists summoned a large public meeting to reorganize it on March 23, 1930. The meeting was successful, and the FOT of Oruro "put in combat order the mass of the workers of the department and exercised an indisputable influence on the Bolivian labor movement. The anarchist FOT became a massive organization, strongly disciplined, combative and very active."<sup>82</sup>

The reorganized FOT of Oruro issued a general call to the workers to rejoin their unions. It said: "The directive Commission of the Central Council of the Federación Obrera de Oruro, conscious of its duty in these moments of hard trial for the proletariat of the country, and specially in this mining region, calls for the *union* of the workers of all trades, so that thus united they can remedy, if only a little, the horrendous evils that menace the humble proletarian homes."<sup>83</sup>

The anarchists sought to reestablish unions in the mines in the Oruro area. They were successful in the San José mine, which had some 3,500 workers. When the company resisted the union, the FOT leaders succeeded in getting the local prefect to agree to a vote among the San José miners, which was overwhelmingly won by the union. They also succeeded in reorganizing the mine workers of Huanuni. However, the FOT was not as successful in the other nearby mines of Catavi, Siglo XX, and Uncía.

Following the pattern established in La Paz, the anarchist-led FOT in Oruro organized a Sindicato Femenino de Oficios Varios. This organization, consisting principally of the market ladies of

the city, soon became "the most combative organization of the FOT."<sup>84</sup>

The principal leaders of the anarchist FOT in Oruro were Jorge and Gabriel Moisés, sons of an immigrant Lebanese businessman, and Luis Gallardo. The Moisés brothers had become anarchists when they lived and worked for five years in Chile, between 1919 and 1924, when they belonged to the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) there. Gallardo had spent some time in Argentina, where he had belonged to the FORA.<sup>85</sup>

We noted earlier the role of the anarchists of Oruro in reorganizing the national labor organization, the Confederación Boliviana del Trabajo, and converting it into the Confederación Obrera Regional Boliviana. Even before that, the FOT of Oruro called itself the Departmental Council of the national organization. Two months before the Fourth Labor Congress, in which the anarchists took control of the national organization, the Oruro group passed a resolution saying, "The Departmental Council of the Confederación Boliviana del Trabajo, in its ordinary session of June sixth of 1930, declares: the doctrine that sustains it is communism and its arm of struggle is libertarian syndicalism."<sup>86</sup>

The authorities did not wait long to crack down on the revived Oruro labor federation. On June 10, 1930, its headquarters were closed by the police, and its leaders were arrested. However, they were apparently released soon after that. Guillermo Lora noted that with the outbreak of the Chaco War, the Oruro group issued a "memorable manifesto" against the war, written by Jorge Moisés.<sup>87</sup> With the onslaught of the conflict, the Oruro labor movement, like that of the rest of the country, was forced by the government to suspend its activities.

## THE PRO-GOVERNMENT LABOR LEADERS

In spite of the major role played in Bolivian organized labor in the decade before the outbreak of the Chaco War by both Marxist and anarchist elements, there continued throughout this period to be an element in the labor leadership that was sympathetic with one or another of the governments of the period, those of Presidents Bautista Saavedra and Hernando Siles.

Guillermo Lora noted that before it seized power in 1920, the Republican Party "was considered to be an organization of the left or at least prolabor." At least some of the people associated with the Socialist parties of the time collaborated in the coup that brought the Republicans to power.<sup>88</sup>

The Partido Laborista of 1927, in its proclamation for the municipal elections of December of that year, took note of the fact

that some labor leaders had run on the tickets of the old parties. It said, "The municipal councilmen elected by the political parties, which on various occasions have sarcastically included one or another name of a labor representative, have not borne fruit as desired by the popular masses. All of the councilmen, including workers . . . have only mocked us, first with flattery and then with most humiliating insults."<sup>89</sup>

Guillermo Lora noted, "Even in 1926 the more advanced labor leaders indicated their most urgent task to be to emancipate the proletariat from control of the parties of the enemy class." Most were still under the influence of the old parties.<sup>90</sup>

Certainly, one reason that some union leaders expressed varying degrees of support for President Bautista Saavedra and then for President Hernando Siles was the belief—or hope—that they might bring about enactment of labor and social legislation. Before the Republican revolution of 1920, about the only examples of that kind of legislation were a law providing for retirement pay for public employees and one requiring that Sunday be a day of rest, both passed in 1915,<sup>91</sup> and a statute requiring mines with fifty or more employees to provide their workers with medical care and pharmaceuticals, enacted early in 1920.<sup>92</sup>

The National Convention that met soon after the Republicans seized power discussed a number of pieces of labor legislation. One proposed establishment of a Supreme Labor Council "charged with formulating laws, decrees and regulations on the social question of labor, and assuring their application in the national territory once they were passed."<sup>93</sup> Another proposal was an "organic Labor Law," a species of labor code.

Nothing concrete came of these discussions at the National Convention. However, in 1924 President Saavedra did sign two laws of some significance. One provided for the eight-hour day for white-collar workers of commerce and industry. The other established a workers' compensation system, covering accidents taking place on the job. Guillermo Lora said of these that they "constituted thereafter the two most valuable elements in our modest labor legislation."<sup>94</sup>

President Hernando Siles, Bautista Saavedra's successor, who broke with him and organized his own Nationalist Party, sought to gain working-class support and at least for a while succeeded to a considerable degree. He visited mining centers, including Uncía, the scene of the 1922 "massacre," and was widely applauded. In various parts of the country, working-class groups formed organizations to support him, first as candidate, then as chief executive.



Those involved in the labor support for Siles included a number of the country's significant labor leaders, of both the past and the period of Siles' presidency. These included, for example, Felipe Ortiz, who had been one of the founders of the Federación Obrera Internacional, and Arturo Borda, for long one of the most important figures in the Bolivian labor movement.

Guillermo Lora said of these people: "It would be an error to deny that many leaders were sincerely convinced that their contact with President Siles could bring positive benefits for the working class. We might call these people honorably deceived, and among them cannot but be included . . . Arturo Borda. But there were also others who profited from the labor movement. Looking at the correspondence of the ex-president one is amazed at the unlimited ambitions that characterized many of the so-called combatants."<sup>95</sup>

Most of the labor leaders, who at first supported Siles, finally turned against him. A number of labor leaders, in Oruro and elsewhere, participated in the insurrection that overthrew President Siles in 1930.<sup>96</sup>

## **ORGANIZED LABOR DURING THE CHACO WAR**

The Chaco War between Bolivia and Paraguay began in June 1932 and lasted for about three years. Although at the onset of the war, victory for Bolivia, which had a German-trained and German-commanded army that was supposed to be one of the strongest in Latin America, seemed most likely, in fact Bolivia suffered an overwhelming defeat. The final peace treaty, signed in 1938, three years after an armistice had brought the fighting to an end, ceded to Paraguay most of the Chaco area, the possession of which was supposedly the cause of the conflict. Of the 250,000 Bolivian soldiers involved in the conflict, 56,000 were killed.<sup>97</sup>

The outbreak of the Chaco War brought what amounted to a military dictatorship under President Daniel Salamanca. However, in November 1934, Salamanca was overthrown and was succeeded by his vice president, José Luis Tejada Sorzano.

Salamanca's overthrow was the first indication of the profound impact that the Chaco War was to have on Bolivia. That conflict undermined the social-economic-political status quo. Large numbers of the middle-class young men who suffered as officers during the conflict were largely disillusioned by the corruption, incompetence, and oppression that they experienced during the war, blaming them not only on the military leaders and the government but on the socioeconomic ruling class that controlled them. On the other hand, the hundreds of thousands

of Indian peasants who were drafted as rank-and-file soldiers returned home after the war much less ready than in the past to accept the oppression to which they had traditionally been subjected. These reactions to the war were to be one important part of the background to the National Revolution that was to begin in April 1952.

Meanwhile, when the war broke out, most unions took a neutral position toward it. However, in not a few cases, union members were caught up in the patriotic fervor that was at first very widespread. It is recounted in a history of the Bricklayers Union of the FOL of La Paz that "the declaration of war and the great outburst of chauvinist propaganda achieved what bayonets could not: the workers abandoned the organization and the struggle and enrolled in the army to go to the Chaco."<sup>98</sup>

Nevertheless, from its inception there was some opposition to the war from within the labor movement. The Communists and anarchists were active in demonstrations, including a protest meeting against the war in La Paz, as a result of which eight leaders of the rally were court-martialed and shot. There were some mutinies among troops and uprisings among the Indians, for which the Communists took credit, although it may not have been deserved. Tristán Marof and some others sent in antiwar propaganda from Argentina, Chile, and Peru, but without much effect.<sup>99</sup>

In general, regardless of the position toward the war taken by individual labor groups, the government tried to make use of the opportunity it presented to get rid of potential "troublemakers," whom it saw as including organized labor. Many labor leaders were put into the army and were sent to the front, with the hope that they would be killed. In many instances this occurred. Most labor leaders who were not at the front during the war were in jail or exile. Strikes were broken ruthlessly; many organizations were destroyed.<sup>100</sup>

Trifonio Delgado Gonzáles described what happened to the labor movement as a result of the war. He said, "The labor organizations, together with other civil activities, entered a period of long and painful forced recess, while the Government, on the pretext of the 'State of War' ended all individual rights and guarantees."<sup>101</sup>

Guillermo Lora also summed up the situation of the labor movement as a consequence of the Chaco War. He wrote, "The Chaco War was fatal for all this generation of labor leaders, isolated them from the masses, paralyzed trade union activity and undermined the socialist ideal."<sup>102</sup>

## NOTES

1. For an extensive discussion of the free trade-protectionist controversy, see Guillermo Lora, *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Boliviano 1848-1900*, Editorial "Los Amigos del Libro," La Paz, 1967, pages 79-112.
2. Ibid., pages 297-312.
3. Ibid., pages 322-350; see also Trifonio Delgado Gonzáles, *100 Años de Lucha Obrera en Bolivia*, Ediciones Isla, La Paz, 1984, pages 23-30.
4. Lora, op. cit., pages 405-417; Gonzáles, op. cit., pages 30-53.
5. Gonzáles, op. cit., pages 61-62.
6. Lora, op. cit., pages 417-433.
7. Guillermo Lora, *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Boliviano 1900-1923*, Editorial "Los Amigos del Libro," La Paz, 1969, page 29.
8. Ibid., page 30.
9. Ibid., page 32.
10. Ibid., page 33.
11. Ibid., page 39.
12. Ibid., pages 98-99.
13. Ibid., page 101.
14. Ibid., page 103.
15. Ibid., pages 217-218.
16. Ibid., page 167.
17. Ibid., page 169.
18. Ibid., page 170.
19. Ibid., pages 171-172.
20. Ibid., page 173.
21. Ibid., page 175.
22. Ibid., page 241.
23. Ibid., page 248.
24. Ibid., pages 245-246.
25. Ibid., page 253.
26. Ibid., page 287.
27. Ibid., page 292.
28. See *ibid.*, pages 287-298 for more details about the FOT of Oruro.
29. See *ibid.*, pages 326 for more information on the Cochabamba labor federation.
30. Ibid., pages 335-336.
31. Ibid., pages 143-149.
32. Ibid., pages 150-151.
33. Ibid., page 151.
34. Ibid., page 153.
35. Ibid., page 156.
36. Ibid., page 160.
37. Ibid., page 46.
38. Ibid., page 53.
39. Ibid., pages 51-52.
40. Ibid., page 178.
41. Ibid., page 180.
42. Ibid., page 182.
43. Interview with Lucio Mendivil, leader of Partido Obrero Revolucionario, senator, in La Paz, May 28, 1947.

44. Lora, 1969, op. cit., pages 129-133.
45. Ibid., pages 180-181.
46. Guillermo Lora, *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Boliviano 1923-1933*, Editorial "Los Amigos del Libro," La Paz, 1970, page 140.
47. Ibid., pages 141-144.
48. Ibid., pages 159-161.
49. Ibid., pages 161-167.
50. Ibid., pages 167-169.
51. Ibid., pages 169-175.
52. Interview with Tristán Marof, head of Partido Socialista Obrero Boliviano, in La Paz, May 26, 1947.
53. Lora, 1970, op. cit., page 164.
54. Lora, 1969, op. cit., page 369.
55. Ibid., pages 365-366.
56. Ibid., page 370.
57. Ibid., pages 372-373.
58. Ibid., pages 380-381.
59. Ibid., pages 382-392; see also Delgado Gonzáles, op. cit., pages 69-78.
60. Lora, 1969, op. cit., page 401.
61. Ibid., pages 401-423.
62. Ibid., pages 425-427.
63. Lora, 1970, op. cit., page 11.
64. Ibid., pages 11-21.
65. Ibid., pages 21-34; see also Gonzáles, pages 78-84.
66. Lora, 1970, op. cit., pages 34-38; see also Gonzáles, op. cit., pages 84-87.
67. Lora, 1970, op. cit., page 38; see also Gonzáles, op. cit., pages 88-90.
68. Lora, 1970, op. cit., pages 46-47.
69. Ibid., pages 48-50; see also Gonzáles, op. cit., pages 90-95.
70. Lora, 1970, op. cit., page 51.
71. Lora, 1969, op. cit., page 258.
72. Ibid., page 265.
73. Ibid., page 258.
74. Lora, 1970, op. cit., page 248.
75. Ibid., page 245.
76. Ibid., pages 175, 248.
77. Ibid., pages 176-178.
78. Ibid., page 63.
79. Ibid., pages 62-68.
80. Ibid., pages 68-71.
81. Ibid., pages 72-75.
82. Ibid., pages 86-87.
83. Ibid., page 89.
84. Ibid., page 88.
85. Ibid., pages 90-92.
86. Ibid., page 92.
87. Ibid., page 93.
88. Ibid., pages 262-263.

89. Ibid., page 159.

90. Ibid., pages 133–134.

91. Ibid., page 375.

92. Ibid., page 381.

93. Ibid., page 377.

94. Ibid., page 381.

95. Lora, 1969, op. cit., page 282.

96. Ibid., page 263.

97. Christopher Mitchell, *The Legacy of Populism in Bolivia: From the MNR to Military Rule*, Praeger, New York, 1977, page 13.

98. Interview with Adolfo Paco Carega, member of Executive Committee of Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores de Bolivia, in La Paz, May 24, 1947.

99. Interview with Tristán Marof, op. cit., May 26, 1947.

100. Interview with Aurelio Alcoba, member of Executive Committee of Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores de Bolivia, in La Paz, May 29, 1947.

101. Gonzáles, op. cit., page 91.

102. Lora, 1970, op. cit., page 315.

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## Unionism from the Chaco War to the Bolivian National Revolution

The functioning of the Bolivian labor movement was largely suspended during the two and a half years of the Chaco War. However, once the conflict was over, organized labor recuperated very rapidly. This was due in considerable degree to the kind of governments that were in power during the immediate postwar years.

In May 1936, some months after the armistice that ended the Chaco War, a military coup by younger officers removed President Tejada Sorzano, putting in his place Colonel David Toro, a leading commander but not a hero of the Chaco War. President Toro declared the existence of a "Socialist State," organized a State Socialist Party as its supposed base, established a Ministry of Labor for the first time, and expropriated the Bolivian holdings of the Standard Oil Company. However, only fourteen months later, Toro was himself overthrown by another young officers' revolt. Colonel Germán Busch, one of the few heroes of the war, succeeded Toro.

The Busch regime issued the first Bolivian Labor Code, encouraged organization of the tin miners, established a Ministry of Mines and Petroleum, and issued a famous decree providing that the tin mining companies had to sell all of the foreign exchange they earned to the government's mining bank. Busch committed suicide only a few days after signing the foreign exchange decree.

When Busch died, General Carlos Quintanilla succeeded to the presidency. A few months later, elections were held, as a result of which General Enrique Peñaranda became president. Both of these general-presidents were conservative defenders of the status quo.

## NEW POLITICAL PARTIES

During this period following the Chaco War there developed a number of political parties that were to play significant roles not only in general politics but also in the labor movement. These included the Partido de la Izquierda Revolucionaria (PIR), the Partido Obrero Revolucionario (POR), Partido Obrero Socialista Boliviano (POSB), and the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR). There also emerged the Falange Socialista Boliviana (FSB), which for a number of years was to be the country's principal right-wing party.

The PIR was established by a group of intellectuals and labor figures, including José Antonio Arze, Fernando Sinani, Ricardo Anaya, Waldo Alvarez, Donato Flores Gironda, and Aurelio Alcoba, who during the Busch period established the Frente de Izquierda Boliviana. A meeting of this group in June 1939 in Cochabamba drew up the "Bases for a Meeting of a Congress of the Left," which served as the basis of the organization of the Partido de la Izquierda Revolucionaria.

The PIR proclaimed itself Marxist but said that it had no international affiliation.<sup>1</sup> However, for the decade of the 1940s it represented the Stalinist tendencies in Bolivian politics. It followed the "line" of the Communist International during World War II, labeling it an "imperialist war" until Russia was invaded by the Nazis in June 1941, when it became a holy war in defense of the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> Its most prominent figure, José Antonio Arze, during periods that he spent in New York City, taught at the so-called Jefferson School, run by the Communist Party of the United States.

The PIR won importance first in the election of 1940. The government candidate was General Peñaranda. Although Tristán Marof was urged to run against him, he did not feel it worthwhile to run when he was doomed to certain defeat. However, the PIR nominated Arze, and to everyone's surprise, including the PIRistas, he carried a number of the biggest working-class centers, including Cochabamba, Oruro, and Potosí.<sup>3</sup> Arze received 15,000 votes out of a total of 85,000.<sup>4</sup> That showing converted the PIR for a time into the most important opposition party.

The Partido Obrero Revolucionario was established in exile by those who had left Bolivia during the Chaco War. In the Argentine city of Córdoba was formed a group that called itself the Grupo Obrero Tupac Amarú, among whose leaders were Tristán Marof (Gustavo Navarro), Luis Peñaloza (later to be head of the Banco Minero under President Villarroel), and Alipio Valencia. This Grupo Obrero Tupac Amarú was friendly with both the Socialists

and the Communists in Argentina and in the beginning did not have any defined ideological position of its own.

In Chile, another group of Bolivian exiles, headed by José Aguirre Gainsborg and Eduardo Arze Loureiro, was avowedly Trotskyist. In 1935 these two elements joined in a congress in Córdoba, Argentina, to form the Partido Obrero Revolucionario. Some of the POR leaders, including Aguirre Gainsborg and Arze Loureiro, returned to Bolivia in 1936 and joined with José Antonio Arze and Ricardo Anaya to form the Bloque de Izquierda Socialista, which entered the Partido Socialista del Estado, organized by the government of President Toro and headed by Enrique Baldivieso, who later became vice president of Bolivia under Colonel Busch. Arze Loureiro and some others continued to work with the Toro regime, but others, including José Antonio Arze and Aguirre Gainsborg, were forced to flee into exile once more.<sup>5</sup>

With the coming to power of Busch, Aguirre Gainsborg, Alipio Valencia, Luis Peñaloza, Tristán Marof, and other POR leaders returned to Bolivia. Marof was welcomed back enthusiastically by the organized workers. He had built up an almost mystical reputation as a fighter for the workers and the oppressed in general.

Marof supported and worked with President Busch. He also became increasingly unhappy with the Trotskyist orientation of the Partido Obrero Revolucionario. At a conference of the POR in October 1938, Marof, with the support of Alipio Valencia, urged the POR to throw off the party's Trotskyist orthodoxy and to try to become a mass organization appealing to industrial and mining workers but also to peasants and middle-class elements.

José Aguirre Gainsborg led the orthodox Trotskyite element in this congress and had the support of the majority. Tristán Marof and his faction, as a consequence, left the POR.<sup>6</sup> In a congress in Cochabamba in 1940 they established the Partido Socialista Obrero Boliviano, which for a short while played a significant role in organized labor. Also, in the 1940 election it won several seats in the Chamber of Deputies.<sup>7</sup>

Of the most importance in the future was the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario, which was founded in January 1941. Christopher Mitchell wrote about it: "The multiclass, mass-based Nationalist Revolutionary Movement . . . became the most influential expression of the reformist, civilian, political ideas generated by the Chaco War."<sup>8</sup> It was led largely by young intellectuals, many of them veterans of the Chaco War, but quickly gained some support in the organized labor movement, particularly after the so-called Catavi Massacre of December 1942. It was to share power after the coup of December 1943, and launched the Bolivian National Revolution in April 1952.<sup>9</sup>



In its formative period, the MNR had already made overtures to obtain support from organized labor, although until the Catavi Massacre it did not begin to become a major influence in the labor movement. Christopher Mitchell noted:

As early as 1938 and 1939, Paz Estenssoro had attended meetings with metalworkers in La Paz, cement workers in Viacha (ten miles from the capital), and railroad workers both there and in the Lake Titicaca port of Guaquí. In 1940, Céspedes supported . . . a successful rail strike, and he also spent time among miners doing research for his novel, *Metal del diablo*. But the MNR did not yet emphasize or put a great deal of effort into such contacts with workers. The party leaders were not averse to labor support where it was relevant in parliamentary elections, and MNR ideology was certainly not antilabor. But worker groups were locked on as sources of issues that could be embarrassing to the conservative government rather than as sources of mobilized mass MNR support.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, there was the Falange Socialista Boliviana, which was to become for two decades the country's principal right-wing party. Mitchell said that at its establishment it was "expressing one current of middle-class opinion in the aftermath of the Chaco War defeat. . . . The Falange's 'Declaration of Principles' has a clearly fascist cast."<sup>11</sup> The Falange never had any significance in the organized labor movement.

## **POLITICS FROM VILLARROEL TO THE BOLIVIAN NATIONAL REVOLUTION**

The Peñaranda government was overthrown by a coup in December 1943, carried out by young army officers and the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario, installing into the presidency Major Gualberto Villarroel. The Villarroel regime was most notable from organized labor's point of view because of its encouragement of the unions, particularly the miners' organization, and because of the tentative overtures it made toward the Indian peasantry.

Villarroel was overthrown—and hanged to a lamppost outside the presidential palace—in July 1946. Then began the so-called Sexenio, during which the MNR and the POR were particularly persecuted by the conservative governments of that period. After a few months of provisional government, under the leadership of Tomás Monje Gutiérrez, a onetime Marxist, elections brought to power Enrique Hertzog, the nominee of the principal right-wing party of the time, the Partido Unión Republicana Socialista. Half-way through his term Hertzog resigned for "health reasons," giving way to his vice president, Mamerto Urriolagoitia. New elec-

tions were held in 1951, showing the MNR nominees for president and vice president, Víctor Paz Estenssoro and Hernán Siles, leading with 54,049 votes compared to 39,940 for their nearest rivals, according to the official count.<sup>12</sup> Thereupon, Urriolagoitia resigned, and a military junta took over, canceling the results of the election. It lasted for less than a year.

The Sexenio was a period of great difficulty and substantial change in the labor movement. Because of widespread workers' support of the MNR and efforts of the MNR to use the labor movement as a weapon against the regime in power, the unions suffered widespread persecution. At the same time, because the Partido de la Izquierda Revolucionaria supported the government of the Sexenio during most of the period, it lost most of its backing in the labor movement.

The Sexenio ended with the triumph of the Bolivian National Revolution on April 9–11, 1952.

## POST-CHACO WAR REVIVAL OF ORGANIZED LABOR

The revival of the labor movement after the Chaco War began with the return of 40,000 prisoners of war from Paraguay early in 1936, after the cessation of hostilities. On May Day 1936 there was a great demonstration in La Paz in favor of stabilization of the currency and an increase in wages. On May 17, 1936, a strike of printing trades workers in La Paz escalated into the first effective, citywide general strike in the history of Bolivia. Eight hours after the strike began, the government of Dr. Tejada Sorzano fell.<sup>13</sup>

The new, self-styled "Socialist" regime of Colonel David Toro, as one of its first acts, established a Ministry of Labor, with Waldo Alvarez, longtime leader of the La Paz printing trades workers, as the first minister. The new government also decreed increases in wages varying from 20 percent to 60 percent.<sup>14</sup>

The new Ministry of Labor issued a decree providing for obligatory unionization of factory workers, craftsmen, and miners, a decree that according to Jorge Dangler, "was influenced by corporativist ideas, but extreme left factions in the Ministry of Labor used it to promote workers unionization in the cities and mining centers."<sup>15</sup>

The decree on compulsory unionization provided that "[t]he unions will be under the permanent instruction and control of the Socialist Government, and the trade union organization will be incorporated in the mechanism of the State as the basis for the functional organization of the public powers."<sup>16</sup>

In another move that was to have great future significance, there was established a Secretariat of Peasant Affairs within the

Ministry of Labor. This post was given to Eduardo Arze Loureiro, a member of Tristán Marof's Partido Socialista Obrero Boliviano. With his help, the first legally recognized union of agricultural workers was established in Ucareña, in the Department of Cochabamba. With certain short interruptions, that union continued until the Bolivian National Revolution, when it played a major role in bringing the agrarian reform to Cochabamba.<sup>17</sup>

Labor organizations revived quickly, and soon both the Federación del Obrero del Trabajo and the Federación Obrera Local of La Paz were active once more. The latter remained under anarchosyndicalist control, although some pro-Communist and other elements sought unsuccessfully to challenge the anarchists.<sup>18</sup> Soon after Colonel Toro took power, the two labor groups signed a pact, with the avowed purpose of establishing a national central labor organization.<sup>19</sup>

## **FOUNDING OF THE CONFEDERACIÓN SINDICAL DE TRABAJADORES DE BOLIVIA**

A national labor congress finally met on November 29, 1936, with 134 delegates present. Union groups from La Paz, Oruro, Cochabamba, Sucre, Potosí, Uyuni, Tarija, Tupiza, Santa Cruz, Beni, and Corocoro were represented. Waldo Alvarez opened the meeting. The congress established the Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores de Bolivia (CSTB).

The founding congress of the CSTB went on record endorsing the Toro government, and for a while thereafter, the CSTB sponsored meetings in support of the regime. That position led the Federación Obrera Local of La Paz to decide not to participate in the CSTB.

The congress adopted a number of resolutions. These included demands for nationalization of the Standard Oil Company's holdings in Bolivia, workers' profit sharing, minimum wage related to the cost of living, and dissolution of mutual benefit societies, "which were regarded as dens of corruption." A demand was also made for freeing all political prisoners.<sup>20</sup>

The CSTB at its inception was based principally on the chauffeurs and factory workers of La Paz, some factory workers' unions in Oruro, and a few groups of miners, as well as various artisans' groups.<sup>21</sup> Guillermo Lora noted, "Artisans were clearly predominant and there were virtually no large groups of vertically-organized workers in the CSTB."<sup>22</sup>

Just before the founding congress of the CSTB, Waldo Alvarez resigned as minister of labor. In spite of demands by the CSTB's founding meeting that it be allowed to choose his successor,

President David Toro ignored this and named "one of the leading lawyers for the Hochschild mining company" to the post. As a result of this and other actions of the president, the CSTB turned against the Toro regime.<sup>23</sup>

The CSTB held a special conference in Oruro in October 1937. By that time, Colonel Germán Busch had taken over the presidency. The new president received the delegates to this conference, during which he agreed to recognize the CSTB legally, and offered to give careful consideration to the resolutions of the confederation.<sup>24</sup>

Most CSTB leaders worked more or less closely with the Busch government, particularly with the minister of government, Colonel Elías Belmonte. In addressing the CSTB Oruro conference, Belmonte declared that the Russian Revolution had cost much blood to bring the workers to power; the Spanish one had cost much blood and had failed; but that in Bolivia the revolution was being made from above, without bloodshed. (After the death of Busch, Belmonte became military attaché in Berlin and was alleged to have become closely allied with the Nazis.)<sup>25</sup>

A national convention was elected in 1938, and in preparation for these elections there was formed a Frente Unión Socialista, which included most of the principal labor leaders, and it elected twenty-four members of the convention. Busch also appointed workers' representatives to various government commissions.<sup>26</sup>

The CSTB held its Second Congress in La Paz in January 1939. About 100 delegates were present, including eleven miners' representatives, three transport workers, and five photographers, the rest of the delegates representing the regional labor organizations from La Paz, Tarija, Oruro, Cochabamba, Chuquisaca, and Potosí.

Among the reports presented to the Second Congress was one from the parliamentary bloc. They listed among their accomplishments a law "that granted the colonial mineshafts of the Cerro de Potosí to the miners," as well as establishment of a railway and trolley car workers' pension fund and helping to prevent the reversion to Standard Oil of holdings that had been taken from it by the Toro regime.

There was considerable political controversy in the Second Congress, particularly between the followers of Tristán Marof and those favoring the Stalinist-oriented Frente de Izquierda Boliviana, led by José Antonio Arze. Fearing the efforts of Arze's backers to make the CSTB part of his "Frente," the Marofist elements, who were in the majority, pushed through a resolution declaring the "complete autonomy" of the CSTB from all political parties.<sup>27</sup>

Trifonio Delgado Gonzáles described the attack of Arze and his colleagues on the leaders of the CSTB in this period. He wrote, "The young Marxist politicians . . . returned from their Chilean exile to their Fatherland, and carrying out their plans, began a campaign to destroy the prestige of the leaders of the Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores de Bolivia and of some departmental federations. They were accused of being incapable, sold to the 'rosca,' ignorant, drunk cholos [mestizos], degenerates and other such things."<sup>28</sup>

Another significant development during the Second CSTB Congress, where there were a substantial number of miners' delegates, was the formation of a committee to organize the establishment of a miners' federation.<sup>29</sup> In August 1939, a miners' congress was finally held in Oruro under the leadership of the followers of Tristán Marof, and a miners' federation was launched, of which Hernán Sánchez Fernández, of the Marof group, was one of the principal leaders.<sup>30</sup> This federation was established only a few days before the death of President Germán Busch and as a result was virtually stillborn. Without government support it made little headway.<sup>31</sup>

Political controversy continued within the CSTB. When the forces led by José Antonio Arze held a congress in July 1940 to convert the Frente de Izquierda Boliviana into a political party, the Partido de la Izquierda Revolucionaria (PIR), an invitation was sent to the CSTB to participate in this meeting. The Executive of the CSTB, still controlled by Tristán Marof's Partido Socialista Obrero Boliviano, refused this invitation.

As a consequence of this quarrel, the CSTB split. The pro-PIR elements called a "congress" of the CSTB in 1942, which chose Aurelio Alcoba of the PIR as its secretary-general. But the majority of the CSTB, including organizations in Tarija, Cochabamba, La Paz, Sucre, Oruro, Catavi, and Coquechaca and most of the miners' unions and the chauffeurs of La Paz, remained loyal to the old leadership.

However, the influence of the PSOB was declining. When the CSTB was finally reunited, it was firmly under the control of the PIR.<sup>32</sup>

## **THE RAILROAD WORKERS CONFEDERATION AND OTHER NATIONAL GROUPS**

Another important labor group that was established during the Busch regime was the Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores Ferroviarios de Bolivia. The railroad workers' delegates had withdrawn from the founding congress of the CSTB.<sup>33</sup> Then in 1938 the railroaders established their own national organization.

The Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores Ferroviarios, with its headquarters in La Paz, was made up of three subsidiary federations. The first was the Federación Central de La Paz, which included unions on the Ferrocarril de La Paz-Yungas-Beni, the Bolivia Power Company (trolley car workers), and a number of other railroads working out of La Paz. The second federation was the Federación de the Bolivian Railway Company y F. C. Antofagasta-Bolivia, with headquarters in Oruro and including the workers of Oruro. The third group was the Federación del Sur, which included workers on the railways in the southern parts of the country.

The Confederación was from its foundation one of the strongest groups in the labor movement. In 1941, the Peñaranda government established the Railroad Workers Retirement Fund, with the proviso that only unionized workers could participate in it, thus making unionization on the railroads virtually compulsory.<sup>34</sup>

Several other national union groups were established by workers of different specialties. These included the Confederación Sindical de Chóferes de Bolivia, organized in May 1936; the Federación Nacional de Trabajadores Gráficos, founded in September 1939; the teachers, who established a national federation in 1939; the bank and commercial workers, founded in 1943; and the flour mill workers, whose federation was also set up in 1943.<sup>35</sup>

## **THE CATAVI MASSACRE**

One of the most historic events involving Bolivian organized labor took place on December 21, 1942, the so-called Catavi Massacre. This was the incident in which the military fired into a crowd of striking workers at the Catavi ore-concentration plant of the Patiño Company in Catavi, with a large number of deaths and injuries.

Important background for what became the Catavi Massacre was a decree issued by the Peñaranda government in December 1941, using the excuse that Bolivia had joined the Allied cause in

World War II, following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. It read, in part, "While the present emergency situation exists, it is totally prohibited to commit any act, intention or incitement that tends directly or indirectly, and for any cause, to diminish, perturb, suspend or destroy production of minerals and products in general or their defense or transport within the national territory."

Important too, were the instructions that Simón Patiño had sent to his lawyer, Tomás Manuel Elio, when the United States had suggested the incorporation of a "labor clause" in a pending agreement to purchase Bolivian tin. Patiño had written, "I call to your attention that the clause under the cover of increasing production is a clear intervention in our internal labor regime, dealing with questions relevant to the fixing of wage, social welfare, and so forth. You will see by my reply that I have rejected this clause."<sup>36</sup>

In the previous year, the unions in Catavi and the nearby Siglo XX mine had presented demands for 10 to 60 percent wage increases, depending on the categories of workers. They had been forced to accept 10 to 30 percent increases. But then in September 1942 the unions presented further demands for wage increases ranging from 20 to 70 percent. This time, the unions were in no mood to compromise. The government declared the Catavi-Siglo XX area a "military zone," and troops were moved into it in considerable numbers. Also, union leaders were arrested.

The workers went out on strike, and the military commander of the area, Colonel Luis Cuenca, failed to convince the union leaders to call off the walkout. Instead, they announced a mass demonstration on December 21.

Guillermo Lora described what happened then:

Soldiers patrolled menacingly around the mining camps and allowed no one, not even the women, to leave camps. The company stores remained closed. In Catavi soldiers fired on a crowd of workers who were heading toward the management offices. It is said that thirty-five people fell, either dead or wounded. In reply the workers decided to gather together a large crowd to reach the offices. An estimated 8,000 workers were mobilized with great rapidity; the largest contingent of demonstrators came from Siglo XX. When the crowd drew near the offices, the soldiers opened fire. . . . The workers scattered and took refuge wherever they could. The shooting continued until three in the afternoon.

The government admitted that 19 people had been killed, including three women, and 40 had been wounded. But "cautious observers" claimed that 40 had been killed, and others put the toll as high as 400 people.<sup>37</sup>

The Catavi Massacre had national and international repercussions. A group of army officers associated with the *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* met with President Peñaranda and told him that they would not stand for any more shooting of Bolivians no matter whose property was involved.<sup>38</sup>

Guillermo Lora indicated that the Catavi Massacre and its aftermath had the result that "the MNR began its rapid rise as a popular 'revolutionary' party."<sup>39</sup>

Victor Paz Estenssoro confirmed that the Catavi Massacre issue "brought the MNR first into contact with the miners on a considerable scale, but it also brought them in touch with members of the armed forces who had a social point of view."<sup>40</sup>

According to Victor Paz Estenssoro, the PIR members of the Chamber of Deputies had first sought to criticize the government in Congress about the Catavi Massacre but had been "cowed" by a strong counterattack by pro-government members. The MNR deputies then joined the debate. Fortunately for them, they had a great deal more firsthand information about what had occurred than the PIR members had had, provided by the secretary-general of the Catavi union, who had succeeded in getting to La Paz, where he went to Paz Estenssoro's house and gave him the workers' version of what had occurred. This strong defense of the miners in congress served to establish strong bonds between the mine workers' unions and the MNR.<sup>41</sup>

The Catavi Incident also aroused continent-wide repercussions. Ernesto Galarza, secretary of labor and social affairs of the Pan American Union, accused the U.S. government of complicity in the massacre, because of its wish to keep wages down so as to keep the price of tin down, and said that the U.S. ambassador to Bolivia had advised against a new labor code that the Bolivian government had proposed.<sup>42</sup>

Vicente Lombardo Toledano, head of the Confederation of Latin American Workers (CTAL), asked Vice President Henry Wallace to intervene, saying that the miners were aware that the price of tin had gone up and that they wanted to share in the profits, adding, "The Latin American governments are sincerely disposed to cooperate in the fight against Nazi-fascism. I have confidence in General Peñaranda, but I believe your cooperation would be most productive of good in the cause of Democracy that we Americans loyally serve."<sup>43</sup>

Bernardo Ibáñez, speaking for the Confederation of Workers of Chile, sent a message to President Peñaranda, disclaiming any desire to interfere in Bolivian internal affairs but saying that he wanted to protest "the false accusations made against the Bolivian labor leaders" and adding that he was aware that "Nazi-



fascists" were seeking to prevent unity between your government and the workers."<sup>44</sup>

A commission was sent from the United States, composed of delegates of the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations, to investigate the Catavi incident, to assess how much blame for it was attributable to U.S. influence, and to see what the U.S. labor movement might be able to do to aid the Bolivian miners.<sup>45</sup>

## THE VILLARROEL GOVERNMENT

Partly as a reflection of the Catavi Massacre, the government of General Peñaranda was overthrown in December 1943 by a coup organized by junior officers belonging to an organization called Razón de Patria (Radepa) and by the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR). It installed Major Gualberto Villarroel as president.

Radepa had been originally established among Bolivian prisoners of war in Paraguay and had subsequently spread among the junior officers of the Bolivian army, who resented the irresponsibility of higher-ranking officers—and of the government itself—during the Chaco War. It was a highly secret organization, the full extent and nature of which even their MNR allies were unaware until after the fall of the Villarroel government.<sup>46</sup>

Earlier, in June 1943, a military coup organized by army officers with more or less sympathy with the Axis had overthrown the Argentine government. When the Villarroel coup occurred, the U.S. government tended to see it as an extension of the influence of the new Argentine regime. Furthermore, they saw the "pro-Nazi" elements in the Villarroel regime as being the MNR and put as their price for recognizing the Villarroel regime the ouster of the three ministers in Villarroel's cabinet, who were members of the MNR. As a consequence, Villarroel and the MNR leaders decided that the MNR cabinet members should resign. The MNR stayed formally outside the regime until January 1945.

However, in fact, the MNR remained, as Víctor Paz Estenssoro put it, "junior partners" in the Villarroel regime, the senior partners being the military men of Razón de Patria. The labor and social programs of that regime were largely due to the influence of the MNR.<sup>47</sup>

When elections for a constituent assembly were held in 1944, the MNR won a majority. They swept the vote in the departments of Oruro, Potosí, Santa Cruz, and Tarija and got the largest vote, but not the majority in La Paz. In accord with Villarroel, the MNR

members of the assembly voted in favor of him as constitutional president.<sup>48</sup>

With the return of the MNR to the government, the Villarroel regime enacted a substantial amount of labor and social legislation. Some of the laws and decrees expanded the social security system; one provided compensation for members and leaders of the Catavi union who had been "persecuted" after the Catavi Massacre. Some of the other legislation was of a broader character—most notably decrees outlawing *pongueaje*, the system by which Indian peasants had to render free personal service to their landlords, and another establishing a commission to study the enactment of an agrarian labor code. These laws and decrees were published in a pamphlet that proclaimed in its introduction that they "constitute an objective demonstration of the work and proposals of the government presided over by Lt. Col. Villarroel, which with support of the young Army and of the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario will continue on its path overcoming the innumerable obstacles put in its way by the dethroned oligarchy."<sup>49</sup>

## ORGANIZED LABOR AND THE VILLARROEL REGIME

The attitude of the labor organizations toward the Villarroel regime depended on their political orientation. In the beginning, it was generally looked upon with favor by the workers.<sup>50</sup> Only the FOL, the anarchosindicalist group, came against the new regime, as it was in opposition to all governments.<sup>51</sup>

The unionists associated with the Partido de la Izquierda Revolucionaria were very strongly in favor of the Villarroel regime during its first few months. Aurelio Alcoba, head of the PIR-controlled faction of the CSTB, made speeches on station Radio America backing Villarroel and ending with "Viva la Segunda revolución de Bolivia!" He claimed that with the advent of the Villarroel government there would be more bread, sugar, and other necessities for the people.<sup>52</sup>

Subsequently, the PIRista CSTB leaders claimed that the CSTB had never officially backed the Villarroel regime.<sup>53</sup> However, Bernardo Ibáñez, then secretary-general of the Confederation of Workers of Chile and a leader also of the Confederation of Workers of Latin America (CTAL), with which the pro-PIR faction of the CSTB was also affiliated, who was at the time in Washington, D.C., read a telegram to reporters on January 19, 1944, "from the leading trade unions of Bolivia," declaring that the Villarroel regime had "the unanimous support of the workers of Bolivia."<sup>54</sup>

The PIR as a political party was at first very friendly to the Villarroel regime. José Antonio Arze, then in the United States, rushed home to Bolivia and on the way gave interviews indicating his sympathy for the new government.<sup>55</sup> Enrique de Lozada, former member of the Bolivian diplomatic corps and in 1943–1944 a close associate of the PIR and of Arze, was named confidential agent of the new regime in Washington.<sup>56</sup>

When Arze returned to La Paz, he had a long conference with Villarroel, in which he offered PIR's support if the regime was reorganized to include (1) the young military elements that were progressive in their point of view; (2) the PIR; (3) the MNR; (4) the CSTB; and (5) independent elements of a "democratic point of view." Villarroel rejected this demand for change in the regime but noted that he was happy that Arze had included the MNR among the "democratic elements" that should be part of the government, since that indicated the falsity of the propaganda being circulated to the effect that the MNR was fascist.<sup>57</sup>

His overtures rejected, Arze started early in March 1944 on a tour of the country to rally the PIR against the government. However, the night he started on his trip he was arrested. Some months later, after he had been elected to the Chamber of Deputies, an attempt was made on Arze's life, and he was wounded. He went into exile, where he stayed until the downfall of Villarroel.<sup>58</sup>

Trifonio Delgado Gonzáles commented on the relationship between the CSTB and the PIR during the Villarroel period. He wrote:

The leaders of the tottering Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores de Bolivia belong in their majority to the Partido de Izquierda Revolucionaria (PIR), political party of the left that monopolized principally the support of the working class leaders of the proletarian organizations. In mobilizing the Confederación they make it agree that only the PIR could lead Bolivian unionism toward achieving the objectives of collective improvement, only the PIR could be the source of the ideals of the Bolivian workers, and that only the PIR was in condition to "save Bolivia" and lead the final battle of the mining Super-State of Patiño, Hochschild and Aramayo and overturn the feudal-bourgeois oligarchy.<sup>59</sup>

The Villarroel government responded to the strong opposition of the PIR and that part of the labor movement that it controlled by doing its utmost to undermine the PIR in organized labor. Some leaders of the pro-PIR CSTB were jailed and exiled, and with government support rival unions were established wherever the CSTB had an organization.<sup>60</sup> At one point, it was even announced that a new Executive Committee of the CSTB had been elected that was favorable to the government.<sup>61</sup>

A rival to the CSTB was organized with government support. The secretary-generalship of the new Confederación de Trabajadores de Bolivia was offered to Nelson Capellano, a young mine workers' leader belonging to the Trotskyist party, the Partido Obrero Revolucionario (POR). However, Capellano turned down the offer, as did other members of the POR.<sup>62</sup> A member of the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario was finally chosen to fill that post.<sup>63</sup>

One of those working with the Villarroel government to rally working-class support was Roberto Hinojosa. He reportedly had been an organizer of the Partido Socialista Revolucionario in the 1920s and had organized and led an attempted insurrection in the frontier military post of Villazón in June 1930. Hinojosa attempted to organize political parties with a working-class base to support the Villarroel government. He established the Partido de la Revolución Boliviana, on whose ticket he was elected senator from Potosí. He also brought about the establishment of a pseudo-Communist party, complete with the name Partido Comunista and the hammer-and-sickle insignia. Hinojosa's activities were not looked on kindly by the MNR. Neither of the parties he established survived the overthrow of the Villarroel regime.<sup>64</sup> Hinojosa was hanged to a lamppost by the mob, alongside President Villarroel, at the time of the overthrow of the regime.<sup>65</sup>

## **ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MINERS FEDERATION**

The most important labor development during the Villarroel period was the successful establishment of the miners' federation, the Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros de Bolivia (FSTMB). Its founding congress met at Huanuni early in June 1944, on the invitation of the Sindicato Mixto of Huanuni, the principal leader of which was Emilio Carvajal, a member of the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario. Guillermo Lora noted, "The credit for promoting the organization of the miners must go to the Villarroel government, and, in particular, to the MNR. This decision was part of a broader strategy: to gain the support of the majority of the workers in order to neutralize the 'democratic' campaign waged by the Stalinist CSTB."<sup>66</sup>

The founding congress of the FSTMB elected Emilio Carvajal as its secretary-general. Juan Lechín was named permanent secretary of the organization, "making him responsible for the day-to-day administration matters and the carrying out of agreements reached by the FSMTB."<sup>67</sup> However, before long Juan Lechín had emerged as the dominant figure within the miners' federation.

Juan Lechín had been a member of the *Legión de Ex-Combatientes* (Veterans' Legion), organized during the Busch administration, and, like Carvajal, was a member of the MNR. He had worked as a white-collar employee and for a short time as a driller in the tin mines but had achieved most publicity as a football (soccer) player on one of the miners' teams.<sup>68</sup>

With the advent of the Villarroel government, Juan Lechín had been appointed subprefect in the province of Bustillo, location of the Siglo XX mine and Catavi processing installation. It had been customary for the mining companies to supplement the meager salaries of the subprefects in the mining areas with monthly stipends. When the first such "payday" came, Lechín not only rejected this subsidy from the Patiño company but had the company official who offered it to him arrested on charges of attempted robbery.<sup>69</sup>

The Second Congress of the miners' federation took place in July 1945 in Potosí. By that time, "Lechín had already assumed virtual control of the Federation." At this congress the structure of the FSTMB was altered, with the creation of the post of the executive secretary, to which Juan Lechín was elected and which he was to occupy for more than forty years. Mario Torres was chosen to replace Emilio Carvajal as secretary-general, a post now subordinate to that of executive secretary.<sup>70</sup>

The Second Congress of the FSTMB clearly supported the Villarroel government and, within it, the MNR. It went on record with a "flattering vote of thanks" to the MNR minister of labor, Germán Monroy Block. It also passed resolutions asking for amnesty for all labor leaders, for Saturday to be declared a day of rest for all workers, and for several other minor matters.<sup>71</sup>

The Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros grew rapidly. According to Juan Lechín, it increased from its original twenty-three unions to sixty-three, and by the time of the fall of the Villarroel government some 90 percent of the workers in the tin mines were unionized.

The unions did other things for the workers than merely win wage increases and get laws enforced. They had cultural activities, conducting night classes for those who could not read and write and for those workers who desired some technical training in order to be better prepared for their work. There were several unions that had libraries, some of which had as many as 3,000–4,000 volumes, including novels, technical works, books on social problems, and Marxist literature. The federation also acquired a radio station in Catavi and established a broad sports program, including a championship football team. A number of affiliates provided death benefits for their members' families.<sup>72</sup>

## THE UNIÓN FABRILES

Another labor group that achieved importance under Villarroel was the Unión Sindical de Trabajadores Fabriles Nacionales (National Factory Workers Trade Union). The Unión Sindical was organized and received government recognition in October 1941, but its principal growth occurred during the Villarroel government. By the middle of 1947 it had twenty-three unions affiliated, all of them factory workers of La Paz. There were about 18,000 factory workers in the city, and practically all were affiliated with the union. It tried to centralize the work of the unions and to standardize their mutual benefit activities. The Unión also tried to see that there were proper safeguards on machines and that the workers had proper equipment, such as protective gloves and glasses. Finally, the Unión Sindical aided the member unions in their annual negotiations with employers over wages, hours, and working conditions.

Throughout most of the Villarroel regime the Unión Sindical was affiliated with the Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores Bolivianos, although some months after Villarroel's fall it withdrew from that group, feeling that the CSTB was not strong enough to be of any use to the Unión Sindical. The Unión Sindical was more interested in maintaining relations with organizations similar to itself in Oruro, Sucre, Potosí, Tarija, and Cochabamba. The head of the Unión Sindical, Florentino Queiróz, was a member of the MNR.<sup>73</sup>

## LABOR DISPUTES UNDER VILLARROEL

There were several important labor disputes during the Villarroel regime, aside from those in the mines. A threatened strike on the Guaquí-La Paz railway line late in 1945 was settled by a wage increase of 20 percent awarded by the minister of labor. The union in return agreed to ask for no more raises "so long as the situation permitted." The secretary-general of the Railroad Workers Confederation, who noted that the wage question had been pending for nine months, said that the union was not afraid to use the right to strike, which was granted by law, and added, "Our conquests will be maintained by every means, fighting against the company and if it should become necessary, fighting against the State itself."<sup>74</sup>

A decision of an arbitration tribunal in October 1945 gave the La Paz printers wage increases of 15-25 percent, depending on the workers' category. The printers agreed not to ask for a further increase for two years.<sup>75</sup> The printing trades workers were report-

edly one of the groups that the Villarroel administration particularly favored.<sup>76</sup>

### THE VILLARROEL GOVERNMENT AND THE INDIANS

Another move of the Villarroel regime that had great future significance for the labor movement was its overtures to the Indian peasants. A few months before the overthrow of Villarroel there occurred a government-sponsored Indian congress. The president himself attended the meeting, sat down, and ate with some of the Indian leaders and in other ways showed his interest in the congress. Such actions by a chief executive were unheard of, and the Indians responded by presenting long and serious discussions of their problems and demands.

The government also proposed to extend the right to vote to members of the existing Indian committees, although not to the peasants in general. There was fear that those Indians who were virtual serfs of their landlords might, in fact, through their votes strengthen the position of the *Rosca*. This extension of the franchise was not enacted.

The Villarroel government took one important legal step on behalf of the peasants. It officially outlawed *pongueaje*, the personal service that the Indians—in addition to having to work gratis on land the landlords cultivated for their own account—had to render to the landowners.<sup>77</sup> However, because Villarroel was overthrown and killed shortly after this decree was issued, it did not become effective until after the Bolivian National Revolution began in 1952.

The Villarroel administration's overtures to the Indian peasants undoubtedly left a deep impression on the leaders of the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario, who participated in them. By the time they returned to power in April 1952, they were determined to bring the Indian masses into the process of the Bolivian National Revolution. They launched a massive land redistribution program, which over a period of years restored ownership of most of the land to the peasantry, preceded by a successful campaign to organize the Indians into peasant *sindicatos* and other organizations that converted the peasant unions, at least for a time, into an integral part of the Bolivian organized labor movement.

## **OVERTHROW OF VILLARROEL REGIME AND ITS AFTERMATH**

The Villarroel regime was overthrown by an uprising in La Paz in July 1946. The final crisis of the regime started with a series of student antigovernment demonstrations early in the month. The market ladies of La Paz joined the fight against the government by declaring a "general strike" on July 18. According to one supporter of the revolt against Villarroel, this "was so effective that there was nowhere even to buy cigarettes. Only the Camacho market opened its doors. The revolution began that day. By the early morning firing was heard in various parts of the city."<sup>78</sup>

Unions associated with the CSTB supported the uprising against the Villarroel regime. However, the miners' organizations demonstrated in favor of the government, although suggestions that they march on La Paz to combat the insurrectionists there did not come to fruition.<sup>79</sup> Following the overthrow and murder of President Villarroel, the mining companies carried out a widespread purge among their workers who had supported the fallen regime.<sup>80</sup>

Rioting continued for three days, and in the final phase mobs stormed the presidential palace. President Gualberto Villarroel and several of his associates, including Roberto Hinojosa, were lynched, and their bodies were strung up on lampposts around the Plaza Murillo, in front of the palace.<sup>81</sup>

The mobs were also seeking some of the MNR leaders, including Victor Paz Estenssoro, who had been removed as minister of finance the day before. However, Paz Estenssoro was hiding in an attic and finally was able to make good his getaway.<sup>82</sup>

A provisional government was established after the overthrow and death of Villarroel. Aurelio Alcoba, a member of the Partido de la Izquierda Revolucionaria and a major leader of the Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores de Bolivia, became minister of labor in this new regime. The Railroad Workers Confederation also announced its backing for the provisional government, noting, "In all of the interior of the country, the railroad workers took part to control the situation in favor of the Revolution." Alcoba set up the permanent secretariat of the CSTB La Paz affiliate, the Federación Obrera Sindical in the offices of the urban police of La Paz.<sup>83</sup>

Early in 1947 there were new elections. Dr. Enrique Hertzog, leader of the right-wing Partido de la Unión Socialista Republicana, defeated the candidate of the Liberal Party, who had been supported by the PIR. However, when Hertzog invited the PIR to join the government, they agreed to do so.<sup>84</sup> The PIR had gotten a



large enough number of members of the Chamber of Deputies for José Antonio Arze to become president of the chamber.<sup>85</sup>

During much of the period of the "Sexenio" (1946–1952), the Partido de la Izquierda Revolucionaria supported and participated in the regime. Christopher Mitchell noted:

The PIR's "coalition partners" in opposing, and (in July 1946) overthrowing and killing Villarroel, turned out to be the political supporters of Bolivia's powerful private tin-mining companies. Since these concerns were the unyielding enemies of Bolivia's nascent labor unions, the PIR found that Moscow's favored strategy had virtually destroyed the party's potential domestic base. The PIR's leaders found that they could not escape the taint of association with Villarroel's overthrow and what had been growing labor support—especially among the influential railway workers—quickly eroded after 1945.<sup>86</sup>

Participation of the PIR in the basically antilabor government of the Sexenio not infrequently brought the party into conflicts with the organized workers. One such case was the so-called Massacre of Potosí of January 1947. Guillermo Lora described that incident:

About 30 members of the Sindicato de Metalúrgicos were marching on the police station to demand the release of their leaders whom they believed had been arrested. The authorities opened fire, killing several workers. That happened on the afternoon of 28 January. The following day PIR militants, who had been armed by the police, entered the mining camps, shooting and killing workers. The people responsible for the massacre have never denied their role in it and have tried to justify their action by arguing that such extreme measures were necessary to combat the MNR and the POR workers.<sup>87</sup>

In December 1949–January 1950 the PIR split. A group, principally from the party's youth, withdrew to form the Communist Party. Then, in July 1952, the Partido de la Izquierda Revolucionaria was officially dissolved.<sup>88</sup>

The Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario was officially outlawed after Villarroel's overthrow. However, in the 1947 election, two senators and seven deputies were elected by the "Miners' Bloc." Of these, Juan Lechín, who was elected senator, and four deputies were members of the MNR. Lechín told me in May 1947 that he had "never resigned" from the MNR. The other members of the Miners' Bloc were Trotskyists, including Senator Lucio MENDIVIL and three deputies, including Guillermo Lora, by then the most important leader of the Partido Obrero Revolucionario.<sup>89</sup>

Lechín and the other members of the Miners' Bloc did not enjoy their parliamentary immunity for long. During the Sexenio

they were frequently jailed, exiled, and otherwise persecuted by the governments of the day.

### **CSTB AND OTHER UNIONS IN THE SEXENIO**

Aside from the miners' federation, which we discuss subsequently, there continued in existence after 1946 the Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores de Bolivia, the Confederación de Trabajadores Ferroviarios, the Unión Sindical de Trabajadores Fabriles, and the Federación Obrera Local, among others.

The CSTB claimed in the middle of 1947, by which time it was under PIR control, to have 160 unions affiliated with it, including federations of chauffeurs and construction workers. There were local federations in each of the country's nine departments. In the underdeveloped eastern department of Beni, for instance, there were some craft unions such as carpenters, painters, and printing trades workers, as well as some agricultural workers and some workers involved in handling rubber production, who belonged to the departmental federation. The CSTB was governed by an Executive Committee consisting of representatives of the nine departmental federations and the two industrial ones.<sup>90</sup>

The CSTB was a much less important organization after the ouster of Villarroel than it had been some years previously. The Unión Sindical de Fabriles withdrew from it, the miners were not in it, and the railroad workers also were not affiliated. The confederación was confined mainly to small artisan groups in the capital and in some provincial cities.<sup>91</sup>

The Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores de Bolivia was controlled by the PIR after the 1946 "revolution," as it had been before it. Of the members of its Executive in May 1947, only two were not admitted members of the PIR, and they were said to be anarchists who were sympathetic to the Partido de Izquierda Revolucionaria.<sup>92</sup>

The PIR was clearly in control of the CSTB in what it called its Third Congress, which met in May 1947, while the provisional government was still in office. That meeting adhered to the PIR position of support of the post-Villarroel governments—members of the ruling junta attended the congress's opening session, and the heads of delegations to the congress met later with provisional president Monje Gutiérrez.

The Third Congress also reflected the PIR's control in a resolution it adopted on political action. Among other things, it stated that "the Class Politics that the trade unions should carry out is that of Authentic and Revolutionary Trade Unionism, scientifically defined in Marxist-Leninist practice and theory."<sup>93</sup>

Guillermo Lora commented, "The Stalinist CSTB had become a government agency." This was underscored by the fact that in February 1951, the confederation received assurances of support from President Mamerto Urriolagoitia.<sup>94</sup>

The Railroad Workers Confederation continued strong. It had 7,000 members in the middle of 1947, including workers on railroads and trolleycars and in the telephone system and electric light and power stations. The unions affiliated with the railroad confederation were composed of both manual workers and white-collar employees.<sup>95</sup>

In the latter part of the Sexenio, the situation of the railroad workers became difficult. When the PIR, to which most of the leaders of the Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores Ferroviarios belonged, finally broke with the government, relations became bad between the confederation and the administration. Finally, early in 1949 the railroad workers' organization was declared illegal as a result of its calling a strike in solidarity with a walkout of bank employees that was then in progress. Nevertheless, the switch in position of the PIR did not assure it control of the railroad workers. By the time of the Bolivian National Revolution in April 1952, most of the railway union leaders had joined the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario.

After the overthrow of Villarroel there were two principal organizations of white-collar workers, the Federación Sindical de Empleados de Comercio and the Liga de Empleados de Comercio, Industria y Banca, the older of the two. In all, there were an estimated 5,000 organized white-collar employees in 1947. It was legally impossible to organize government employees, although there were some unsuccessful attempts to do so during this period.<sup>96</sup>

A new group formed after the 1946 uprising was the Confederación Nacional de Maestros (Teachers Confederation), which in May 1947 claimed 28,000 members. Teachers' groups had existed during the Toro regime but had been outlawed in June 1942 by a decree of the Peñaranda government.<sup>97</sup>

Early in 1947 the labor groups under MNR and Trotskyist influence launched a very loosely federated central labor body, the Central Obrera Nacional. It included the miners, printing trades workers, construction workers, bakers, and some agricultural workers' unions.<sup>98</sup> Some months later, most of the labor groups of the country were brought together in the National Executive Committee of Bolivian Workers for the purpose of fighting for certain measures then before congress. However, although it included most of the labor organizations except the Federación

Obrera Local, it did nothing further to really unite those groups into one central labor body.<sup>99</sup>

The numerical strength of the Bolivian labor movement during the Sexenio period was the subject of considerable dispute. Adolfo Paco Careaga, a leader of the CSTB, estimated in 1947 that there were about 300,000 organized workers, with the majority of these belonging to the CSTB.<sup>100</sup> Aurelio Alcoba, on the other hand, maintained that the CSTB had 60,000 workers; the Federación Minera about 50,000; the Confederación Ferroviaria about 20,000; the Unión de Fabriles about 15,000; and the Federación de Chóferes about 5,000. He credited the FOL with perhaps 2,000 members.<sup>101</sup>

However, my own estimates of the size of the Bolivian labor movement in May 1947 were substantially smaller than any of these figures. I calculated at that time that there were probably not more than 75,000 organized workers. I surmised that the Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros had about 30,000; the Unión Sindical de Trabajadores Fabriles about 15,000; and the CSTB at also about 15,000. The railroad workers had about 7,000 members; white-collar workers' groups about 5,000; the bakers' federation 1,000; and the Federación Obrera Local perhaps 10,000 or a bit more.

## THE FEDERACIÓN OBRERA LOCAL

The anarchosyndicalist Federación Obrera Local of La Paz continued to be a significant part of the Bolivian labor movement during the Sexenio period. Although when I first had contact with them in 1947, I found that the FOL leaders were not too strong on anarchist doctrine, they did certainly stick to the main organizational principles of anarchosyndicalist unionism—avoidance of partisan political action and emphasis on direct action.

The FOL had carried on a running battle with the CSTB and its La Paz group, the Federación Obrera Sindical. Typical was a throwaway it distributed in March 1942 in which, among other things, it said, "We know in excess the deplorable position of the puppets and adulators of this group under Toro first, then Busch later, giving the people a drug to put them to sleep, socialism of the sword, a so-called socialism, made in Germany." (The last three words were in English.)<sup>102</sup>

As early as October 1937, the conference of the Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores de Bolivia had "declared dissolved" the FOL and ordered its affiliates to join the CSTB unions in La Paz.<sup>103</sup> The FOL had paid no attention to this order of dissolution.

The FOL had continued its strong opposition to electoral participation. Typical of its position on this issue was a throwaway in March 1938 in which it "DECLARED: 1. That this federation has no part at all in the formation of the so-called Socialist United Front. 2. Will not support any candidate, in accordance with its principles. 3. Since the labor congress in this city in November 1936 has not had agreements with any organization or signed any pact whatsoever."<sup>104</sup>

In this same spirit, the Federación Obrera Femenina affiliate of the FOL had denounced the idea of women's suffrage. It said that it "rejected this 'famous woman's right,' because it understands that the bourgeoisie has only one objective: to bring under its despotic control the suffering class, to sustain the comedy of popular suffrage with which the politicians sell their working-class conscience."<sup>105</sup>

Early in 1947, the FOL leaders claimed that their organization was equal in size to the CSTB and the Unión Sindical de Fabriles combined. They listed the following organizations as belonging to the FOL:

- The Federación de Inquilinos, consisting of rent-payers' committees throughout the city of La Paz, with about 5,000 members.
- The Federación Obrera Femenina, which consisted of eleven unions, including cooks, market women, maids, and textile workers, and had an estimated 5,3000 members.
- The Federación Agraria Departamental, the chief center of strength of the FOL, with unions on most of the haciendas around La Paz, and with a total claimed membership of about 20,000.
- The Unión Sindical de Trabajadores en Madera, including all kinds of woodworkers, with 700 members. This group was the one that had originally called the conference in 1927 at which the FOL was launched.
- The Sindicato de Culinierías (restaurant workers) with about 500 members.
- The Sindicato de Trabajadores Christian Nielso, workers in a factory with about 1,500 employees.
- The Sindicato de Trabajadores en Mosáicos (mosaic workers), with about 500 members.
- The Sindicato de Trabajadores en Cuero (leather workers), with eighty members, the employees of the Curtiembre Inca firm.

- The Sindicato de Trabajadores en Hospitales (hospital workers) with some 670 members.<sup>106</sup>

One of the more important FOL unions, the Sindicato de Albaniles, Constructores y Ramas Similares (bricklayers and allied trades) suffered a split during this period. The CSTB won over one of its principal leaders, Pedro Agustín Mostajo, who succeeded in getting the union to disaffiliate from the FOL and join the CSTB. However, those loyal to the anarchosindicalist organization reacted by expelling Mostajo from the organization and having it rejoin the FOL.<sup>107</sup>

The Federación Obrera Local was governed by a body composed of two delegates from each affiliated organization. However, there also existed the "federal council" of the FOL, composed of anarchist elements, which sought to maintain the ideological purity of the federación. It was roughly comparable, in its relations with the FOL, to the position of the Spanish Federación Anarquista Ibérica (FAI) vis-à-vis the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo.<sup>108</sup>

The most significant aspect of the Federación Obrera Local during the Sexenio was its organization and maintenance of the Federación Agraria Departamental (FAD). This was the first substantial organization of unions among the Indian peasants of Bolivia's high plateau (altiplano).

According to Guillermo Lora, the FAD was established in December 1946. He said that "anarchism has the great merit of having put on its feet the powerful and combative Federación Agraria Departamental, which has written one of the most brilliant pages of the peasant rebellion."<sup>109</sup>

Lora said of the unions of the FAD: "The fundamental activity of these unions was to spread culture among the peasant children; they raised schools and were chosen by the peasants themselves to be rural teachers. The masses soon learned that the alphabet is not sufficient to free them so long as there remains the tremendous problem of the land."<sup>110</sup>

One opponent of the FOL estimated in 1947 that it had 50,000 members and that in the May Day 1947 parade it organized, it had seventy unions participating, most of which were composed of agricultural workers.<sup>111</sup>

In May 1947, when seventy-one peasant delegates were meeting in the headquarters of the FOL, the police raided the meeting. The delegates were arrested and charged with "subversion." Some of them were exiled to an isolated area in tropical Bolivia, "a deadly zone for men of the Altiplano." Guillermo Lora noted, how-

ever, that the FOL's Peasants Federation "was maintained until the formation of the COB in 1952, which the peasants joined."<sup>112</sup>

The FOL and its principal affiliates strongly protested the arrest of the leaders of the Federación Agraria Departamental. The FOL issued a throwaway on May 24, 1947, which pledged that "in this struggle in our defense, which is the defense of freedom and justice, to use the last drop of our proletarian blood."<sup>113</sup> A few days later, both the Federación Obrera Femenina and the Federación Agraria Departamental issued calls for a general strike of protest.<sup>114</sup> However, the FOL general strike was only moderately successful, and the federation was certainly weakened by this showdown with the government.

The FOL, particularly its Federación Obrera Femenina, had participated fully in the rioting that brought down the Villarroel regime. The FOL expressed its position in a manifesto issued shortly after that event. The statement said:

The Federación Obrera Local raises its liberation flag, in this historic hour for the workers of the country as a consequence of the Popular Revolution that brought the overthrow of one of the political contradictions of the capitalist regime, that is, the Nazi-fascist government of the bloody military camarilla and the fearsome Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario, which placed the people in a state of slavery without rights and its freedom subjugated to a social economy of hunger and slavery. In the face of this, the people, without distinction of political and ideological colors, men and women and children, demonstrated their iron will and sovereignty, shouting in the streets and plazas Liberty and Social Justice! For this objective and rights they offered their lives and their blood.

However, unlike the PIR, which also helped to end the Villarroel regime, the FOL had little use for the government that succeeded it. It quickly made this clear. In the manifesto that we have been quoting, the FOL said:

Now we are faced with other consequences. That same caste attempted to rehabilitate itself in the name of the Popular Revolution and of bourgeois democracy. We have to challenge the betrayal of the libertarian revolution, the rehabilitation of past tyrants and unconditional servants of the parasitical class, such as Peñaranda, Toro and other military men and civilians, who have cast into mourning the proletarian homes with massacres, and when the hecatomb of Catavi is still fresh in the memories of the workers.

The FOL manifesto called upon the workers "to strengthen their own trade union organizations, clarifying their true class

positions outside of the histrionics of local politics, and only thus will it march to strengthen the Popular Revolution."<sup>115</sup>

### THE MINERS FEDERATION DURING THE SEXENIO

The Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros de Bolivia was undoubtedly the strongest and most militant union group in Bolivia during the Sexenio. It was also the union that was most persecuted by various governments of the period.

During those six years there were two major political groups active within the FSTMB. These were the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario and the Trotskyist Partido Obrero Revolucionario. The most important figures in the "Movimientista" group were the federation's executive secretary Juan Lechín and Secretary-General Mario Torres—although Guillermo Lora said that for a short while after the overthrow of the Villarroel regime Lechín "became secretly affiliated to the POR,"<sup>116</sup> apparently without abandoning his membership in the MNR, which, as I have noted, he told me in May 1947 that he still maintained.

The principal Trotskyist figure in the miners' federation in this period was Guillermo Lora. Although he was at the time a university student, he spent much of his time in the mining towns organizing party cells and therefore becoming involved in trade union activities. He had been jailed at the time of the Catavi Massacre and late in 1945 had been chosen to represent the Siglo XX mine workers at a conciliation tribunal.<sup>117</sup>

In the period following the ousting of the Villarroel regime, Lora was working very closely with Lechín. Thus, when the FSTMB held a congress in November 1946 at Pulacayo, it was he who presented a statement of principles of the federation that became famous as the Pulacayo Thesis. However, as Lora himself wrote, "The Thesis was put to the conference, after some careful conspiracy, without the knowledge of the executive secretary, Lechín. . . . The Siglo XX delegation and a few other Trotskyist supporters knew about the proposal and were prepared to defend and support it. It was approved by the congress largely because it came as a surprise."<sup>118</sup>

The Pulacayo Thesis was written by Guillermo Lora. Many years later, he wrote that "this remains the most important things I have said, done or written."<sup>119</sup> It was a thoroughly Trotskyist document.

The thesis set forth Leon Trotsky's theory (without attribution to him) of "combined and uneven development." In commenting on the thesis many years later, Lora summed up this theory insofar as it applied to Bolivia: "Since the feudal bourgeoisie



demonstrated itself incapable of carrying out its historical tasks, and given the geographical dispersion and the backwardness of the vast mass of peasants and the impossibility of consistent and independent class action by the petty bourgeoisie, it was left for the proletariat to bring about those bourgeois-democratic reforms which are the precondition for the creation of a socialist society. . . . The mineworkers were therefore defined as the vanguard of the whole country," as the most clearly proletarian element in Bolivian society.<sup>120</sup>

The thesis proclaimed:

The proletarian revolution in Bolivia does not imply the exclusion of other exploited social groups. On the contrary, it requires that the proletariat enter into a revolutionary alliance with the peasants, artisans and other sectors of the petty bourgeoisie. The dictatorship of the proletariat is the projection of this alliance to the level of the state. The term "proletarian revolution" and "dictatorship of the proletariat" are used to emphasize the leading role of the working class in the transformation and in the new state.<sup>121</sup>

The thesis also proposed a system of "workers' control," in the sense of "the control of the companies by part of the working class." It likewise proposed the arming of the workers as "the logical conclusion of the main line of argument of the Thesis: namely that the dominant class must be overthrown by a revolution."<sup>122</sup>

Many years later, Trifonio Delgado González wrote that the thesis "was read, with close attention by some, contemptuously by others, and generally not understood by anyone but 'approved by a majority.' "<sup>123</sup>

The Pulacayo Congress also agreed to organize a "Miners' Bloc" for the forthcoming elections. Six candidates of the bloc were elected: Juan Lechín and Lucio Mendivil as senators and Jesús Aspiazu, Alberto Costa L., Adan Rojas, Humberto Salamanca, Mario Torres, Guillermo Lora, and Aníbal Vargas as members of the Chamber of Deputies. To prevent these representatives from being recognized as the official opposition in congress and even to challenge the validity of their election, several parties formed a United Front of the Opposition, which, being more numerous than the Bloque Minero, held all posts allocated to the opposition in various parliamentary committees.<sup>124</sup>

Another congress of the FSTMB, the fourth, was held in Colquiri in June 1947. It was addressed by minister of labor Alfredo Mendizábal, a member of the PIR, who lamented that "the workers have been provoked into anarchistic uprisings that undermine the stability of the nation." The Trotskyists again had a major role

in writing the resolutions of this meeting, including one entitled "Tactical Advice: How to retreat without being destroyed."

The Fourth Congress was particularly worried by the Hertzog government's efforts to divide the labor movement. It passed a resolution to "denounce all attempts at dividing the movement and to expel anyone who attempted to do so. . . . To promote distrust of the government among all sectors of the population, denouncing every inopportune step it takes, and above all exposing the infringements of civil liberties."<sup>125</sup>

The miners' federation faced several major crises during the Sexenio. On January 28, 1947, there occurred what came to be known as "the Massacre of Potosí," which we have already noted. Later in 1947, there occurred what came to be known as the "white massacre." As a means of breaking the union in its Catavi operation, the Patiño Mines Company proposed to dismiss all of the workers there and then reemploy only those who were not "troublemakers." President Hertzog also decreed, "Dismissed workers must leave areas as soon as possible; cannot be permitted to remain under any pretext; if fail to do so will be considered agitators, enemies of public order."<sup>126</sup>

On September 5, 1947, the cabinet issued a Supreme Resolution completely accepting the Patiño Company's proposal, saying: "The Executive declares the conflict that has arisen between the workers of Catavi, Llallagua, and Siglo XX and Patiño Mines Enterprise to be terminated owing to the capitulation of the workers, since their request for the dismissal of the workforce has been accepted and will be carried out on the lines agreed to by the Supreme Government." Among those signing this decree were the PIR members of the cabinet, and although their action was subsequently repudiated by the party, and the ministers were forced to resign, this action undoubtedly lost the Partido de la Izquierda Revolucionaria much labor support.<sup>127</sup>

However, the Patiño Mines maneuver did not destroy the workers' organization there. Guillermo Lora noted, "Contrary to the employers' expectations, strong, determined unions were secretly reorganized in Siglo XX, Catavi, Huanuni, and Vilosco, defying all the obstacles presented by the companies and the government."<sup>128</sup>

President Hertzog had apparently refused demands that massive government violence be used to break the mine workers' union movement. In May 1949, he resigned, apparently under pressure, and was succeeded by Vice President Mamerto Urriolagoitia. The new president was willing to take such measures.

On May 28, 1949, there was a widespread series of arrests of mine union leaders, including Lechín, Mario Torres, Nelson

Capellino, and Guillermo Lora. Most of the arrested labor leaders were deported to Chile.

The jailing of their leaders brought an immediate strong reaction from the miners, particularly in Siglo XX, Catavi, and Llallagua. An immediate strike was called, and thirty-three mine officials, most of them Americans, were taken prisoner as hostages. Two of the hostages died in captivity. The miners also seized the police barracks at Siglo XX and moved to take over the company's administrative offices in Llallagua. However, the government declared the Catavi-Siglo XX area an "emergency zone," and troops were dispatched there.

There were pitched battles between the army units and the miners armed with dynamite and some small arms. As one army officer reported, "We reacted to this danger by ordering the troops to capture or kill the marauders. Those from Llallagua were silenced once and for all."

With the arrest of most of the top leaders of the FSTMB, the miners' bloc in congress assumed the leadership of the federation on an emergency basis. This soon resulted in their being expelled from congress. Most of the FSTMB officers were put on trial, a long process that was not completed until January 1951. Four of the Siglo XX union leaders were sentenced to death, although none were executed. Another four were given ten-year jail terms, and another eight were sentenced to six to eight months' terms. The top leaders, including Juan Lechín and Guillermo Lora, were never sentenced. All were released with the triumph of the Bolivian National Revolution in April 1952.<sup>129</sup>

Meanwhile, the Fifth Congress of the FSTMB had met at Telemayu in June 1948. By this time, Juan Lechín and his followers had decided that the Thesis of Pulacayo should be revised. The Trotskyists were not opposed to this if local unions were consulted. So a unanimous resolution to undertake the process of revision was passed. "However, this was never done, because of the laziness of the right wing," according to Guillermo Lora.<sup>130</sup>

Relations between the government and the miners' federation were certainly not improved by a revolutionary attempt by the Movimiento Nacionalista in August 1949. The MNR succeeded in gaining control of the Department of Santa Cruz and part of Cochabamba but were finally defeated.<sup>131</sup>

The last congress of the FSTMB before the National Revolution took place at Milluni, near La Paz, on November 9, 1950. Again, the current minister of labor spoke to its opening session. In this speech, he seemed to take for granted that the government's drive against the MNR-POR influences among the miners had been successful. He claimed: "The miners are at last free of those un-

healthy influences that have given rise to such painful experiences and so many disappointments, influences that promoted an atmosphere of general distrust, making the workers seem recalcitrant extremists and enemies of public peace."

However, the actions of the FSTMB Sixth Congress did not bear out the minister's words. It reelected "Movimientistas" Juan Lechín and Mario Torres as executive secretary and general secretary, respectively. It also rejected an effort to replace the Thesis of Pulacayo with an "Antithesis of Pulacayo" drawn up by the Ministry of Labor. It demanded a general amnesty for all trade union leaders and called on the country's other unions to support "the struggle initiated by the FSTMB."<sup>132</sup>

### **EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH A NEW CENTRAL LABOR ORGANIZATION**

Between 1948 and the revolution of April 1952, efforts were made, with the help of the newly established Inter American Confederation of Workers (CIT), to establish a new central labor organization that would be free of control of not only the PIR but also of the MNR and the POR. The initiative for establishing such an organization was taken in September 1948 with a visit to Bolivia of the Peruvian trade unionist Arturo Jáuregui and his Chilean colleague Manuel Hormazábal, on behalf of the CIT. At that time, they met with leaders of some of the country's important unions and, among other things, attended a meeting in honor of Florentino Queiróz, secretary-general of the Unión Sindical de Trabajadores Fabriles.<sup>133</sup>

The CIT representatives were not able to get the Unión de Fabriles to get involved in the effort to organize a new central labor body. However, they did win the cooperation of Victor Daza, for long one of the principal trade union leaders of Cochabamba, who had been a "delegate" to the founding congress of the CIT in January 1948.<sup>134</sup> In his youth, Daza had worked in the Chilean nitrate fields and had become a subsecretary of the Federación Obrera de Chile (FOCh), under Luis Emilio Recabarren. Expelled from Chile in 1919, he and his brother Arturo settled in Cochabamba and became two of the area's most important labor figures. They were particularly active in trying to organize the peasants of the region. (It is interesting that in a generally laudatory account of the careers of the Daza brothers, Guillermo Lora does not mention Victor's association with the CBT, of which he certainly did not approve.)<sup>135</sup>

Under Victor Daza's leadership, a Confederación Boliviana de Trabajadores (CBT) was soon established. It received financial aid

from the CIT, and the government of President Hertzog also offered financial assistance, which the CBT claimed that it had rejected.<sup>136</sup>

On the occasion of a visit to Bolivia early in 1950 by Bernardo Ibáñez, then president of the Confederación Interamericana de Trabajadores, it was decided to set up three regional headquarters for the CBT, in Uyuni in the south, Oruro in the center, and La Paz in the north. The purpose of these centers would be to try to recruit unions that would be represented in a so-called National Democratic Trade Union Congress.

For a while at least, the strength of the CBT seemed to be centered in Oruro. The local departmental labor federation, the Federación Obrera Sindical Departamental de Oruro, which had belonged to the CSTB, withdrew and joined the CBT. The headquarters of the CBT were established in Oruro, although it also had an office in the regional headquarters of the Confederación Interamericana de Trabajadores, which Victor Daza opened in La Paz.<sup>137</sup>

The efforts to establish the CBT seemed for a while to be favored by the failure in May 1950 of a general strike, which was led by a Workers Coordinating Committee, on which the MNR, PIR, and POR were all represented.<sup>138</sup> That walkout involved principally the railroad workers and the factory workers and other groups in La Paz and other major cities. At one point, the chief of police of La Paz talked to the principal union leaders involved in the strike, who were in jail, asked them to order a return to work, and promised that there would be no reprisals against the workers. However, the military repudiated this promise, and the strike was broken violently. Most of the labor leaders involved were sent to a concentration camp in the middle of Lake Titicaca.<sup>139</sup>

With the collapse of the May 1950 general walkout, President Urriolagoitia issued a decree that "deposed all Communist and Nazifascist trade union officials throughout the Republic."<sup>140</sup> New union elections were called throughout the nation. Elements sympathetic to the CBT were elected in some unions, including that of the workers of the La Paz-Guaquí Railroad Workers Union. In La Paz there suddenly appeared a new Unión Sindical de Trabajadores Fabriles Libres, which included a number of unions in the smaller factories in the city. Victor Daza and other CBT leaders took an active part in the reorganization of various unions.<sup>141</sup>

However, generally these new union elections did not have the results that the government had intended. MNR, POR, and PIR leaders continued to be active in the leadership of most unions, as the CIT representative Luis López Aliaga admitted.<sup>142</sup>

## STATE OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT AT THE END OF THE SEXENIO

The efforts to organize a new central labor body in which the MNR, PIR, and POR would not have a part proved largely fruitless. The CBT did not survive the Bolivian National Revolution of April 1952.

The Trotskyist leader Guillermo Lora summed up the political situation within the labor movement by the end of the Sexenio. He wrote:

Both the MNR and the POR were in opposition to the government, and at the union level there were frequent tacit agreements between the two political organizations. But despite their radicalism and their militancy most workers, and especially most miners, rallied to the leadership offered by the petty-bourgeois MNR, a party that only reluctantly expressed Marxist ideas, in preference to the POR. This occurred because organized labor held the large mining companies responsible for the government that had come to power after 21 July 1946. It followed almost automatically that Villarroel was now seen as a paradigm of proletarian radicalism and the defender of the workers' interests. Villarroelism became synonymous with the MNR. . . . To a certain extent the MNR's numerical strength was a product of the confusion made possible by the party's lack of a clearly defined ideological position.<sup>143</sup>

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## Organized Labor during the Bolivian National Revolution

On April 9, 1952, there began the Bolivian National Revolution. It was to bring profound economic, social, and political changes to the country and open a new chapter in the history of the Bolivian labor movement.

In May 1951 elections had been held. After considerable internal discussion, the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionaria had decided to participate in them and named Víctor Paz Estenssoro and Hernán Siles (son of former President Hernando Siles) as its candidates for president and vice president. The MNR candidates clearly were in the lead as the votes were counted. Víctor Paz claimed many years later that he and Siles had received 70 percent of the votes.<sup>1</sup> However, to prevent the MNR from coming to power at that time, President Mamerto Urriolagoitia resigned and turned power over to a military junta.<sup>2</sup>

General Antonio Seleme was minister of government in that junta regime and commander of the militarized national police, known as the *carabineros*, the number and armament of which were almost equal to those of the army. Early in 1952, General Seleme joined in a conspiracy with the underground leaders of the MNR, Hernán Siles, and Juan Lechín, as a consequence of which the revolt against the military junta began on April 9. The fighting went on for three days, the army seeming to be victorious on April 10, but on the following day the *carabineros* and the armed workers of La Paz, led by Siles and Lechín and seconded by miners who joined the rebels on the rim of the altiplano above the city of La Paz, finally triumphed.

Meanwhile, the MNR revolt had been successful in most of the interior cities and towns. In the case of the mining city of Oruro

the miners seized control of the city, and when two regiments of loyal troops were sent toward Oruro to retake the city, the miners succeeded in outmaneuvering them and soundly defeated both of these military units. The miners took bloody revenge on one of the regiments involved, which had previously been sent to occupy mining camps near Oruro.<sup>3</sup>

Since General Seleme, who had originally been promised the presidency, had taken refuge in an embassy on the second day of the revolt, Siles and Lechín dispensed with him. Seleme ended up as an ambassador instead of as president of the republic.

At that point, Siles assumed the post of vice president, on the basis of the 1951 election results, and summoned back from exile Víctor Paz Estenssoro. Paz was sworn in as constitutional president on April 17, 1952, and Hernán Siles continued in the vice presidency.<sup>4</sup>

The MNR remained in power until November 4, 1964. During these twelve and a half years it carried out fundamental changes in the country's politics, economy, and society. One of the first acts of the MNR government was to establish universal adult suffrage, thus giving the vote for the first time to the illiterates, particularly the Indian peasantry. In October 1952 it expropriated the properties of the Big Three mining concerns, Patiño, Aramayo, and Hochschild.<sup>5</sup> In August 1953, it enacted a drastic agrarian reform, quite literally "giving the land back to the Indians."

The revolutionary government also launched a massive primary education program, with which the Indian peasants cooperated enthusiastically. During the first four years, it also launched an ambitious—probably overly ambitious—economic development program, the principal fruits of which were the completion of a road between Cochabamba and the eastern city of Santa Cruz and a rapid expansion of output of the petroleum industry.<sup>6</sup>

However, the MNR regime confronted very serious difficulties, both economic and political. Of major importance was the growing crisis of the tin mining industry. The output of the Big Three tin concerns—now converted into the government's *Corporación Minera de Bolivia* (COMIBOL)—had been declining for some years, in large part due to the exhaustion of many of the mines and the failure of the Big Three to modernize the mines and seek new ones. After 1952 this situation was intensified by the withdrawal by the Big Three of virtually all of the foreign technicians and administrators and by labor problems, which we discuss shortly. There were also difficulties presented by the need to pay recompense to the expropriated firms, and the instability of world tin prices.<sup>7</sup>

By the end of Paz Estenssoro's first term, in 1956, the country was faced with an economic crisis of major proportions. There were severe shortages of foreign exchange, an inflation that was virtually out of control, and growing shortages of the simplest consumption goods.

At the end of his term, Paz Estenssoro enacted an economic stabilization program. But it was left to his elected successor, Hernán Siles, to carry out that program, which became the source of the first major crisis between the revolutionary government and part of the labor movement.

However, two other factors were of even greater consequence for the fate of the revolutionary regime. These were the disintegration of the *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* itself and the growing strength of the armed forces.

There were four principal leaders of the MNR: Víctor Paz Estenssoro; Hernán Siles; Walter Guevara Arce, who served as foreign minister and minister of interior of Presidents Paz and Siles; and Juan Lechín, then the virtually unchallenged leader of the Mine Workers Federation. During the first few years of the MNR regime, it was widely understood that these four would succeed one another in the presidency.<sup>8</sup> However, that proved not to be the case.

As the end of Hernán Siles' term approached, there was very strong opposition from the so-called Left of the MNR (including much of the labor movement) to the naming as the party's presidential candidate of Walter Guevara Arce, who was regarded to be the leader of the "Right" of the party. In retrospect, this "Left versus Right" distinction in the party seems rather ridiculous, since all four men—and their supporters—were solidly committed to the major programs of the MNR regime (agrarian reform, mine nationalization, massive education, and economic development). However, at the time the distinction was a reality.

As a consequence of this situation, most of the MNR leadership felt that the only solution to the problem was the reelection of Víctor Paz Estenssoro in 1960. He was named the MNR candidate, with Juan Lechín as the nominee for vice president. But Walter Guevara Arce did not accept this, as a consequence of which he brought about the first major split in the party, forming his own *Partido Revolucionario Auténtico* (PRA).

When the end of Paz Estenssoro's second term approached, the same problem of succession was faced by the MNR. There was strong opposition within the party to the expected nomination of Juan Lechín as the MNR presidential candidate in 1964. This opposition was strongly seconded—mistakenly—by the U.S. Embassy.

As a result of this situation, Víctor Paz Estenssoro was named as a candidate for a third term—the constitution having been changed in 1961 to make that possible.<sup>9</sup> As had happened four years before, the disappointed nominee, Juan Lechín this time, withdrew from the MNR, forming his own Partido Revolucionario de la Izquierda Nacionalista (PRIN). Although he did not join Lechín's new party, ex-president Hernán Siles also expressed his opposition to Paz Estenssoro's nomination.

That situation paved the way for the fall of the MNR government. Of major importance in that event was the role of the armed forces. Right after seizing power, the MNR regime had dissolved the army, which it had defeated in open combat. However, after a few months, the army was revived on a limited scale. Its officer ranks were presumably thoroughly checked to make sure of their loyalty to the revolution and the MNR, and the army was kept small during the first Paz Estenssoro administration; the army was largely engaged in carrying out economic development projects—road building, colonization programs in the east, and other things. For its military security, the revolutionary regime depended principally on armed militia of the miners, peasants, and urban workers.

However, this situation changed during the Siles administration. Due largely to the pressure of the United States, whose economic aid program had become a major factor in the stability of the regime, the army was substantially enlarged, rearmed, and converted once again into a military rather than an economic development institution. By the end of Paz Estenssoro's second term, it was in a position to challenge the revolutionary regime itself.

The three months following Paz Estenssoro's reelection were marked by extensive plotting against the Paz Estenssoro government. Participants in this plotting undoubtedly included the vice president, General Barrientos, and such dissident MNR civilian leaders as Walter Guevara Arce, Juan Lechín, and Hernán Siles.

This plotting resulted early in November 1964 in an uprising of the armed forces. President Paz Estenssoro was overthrown and sent into exile in Peru. For all practical purposes, the government of the National Revolution that the MNR had installed twelve and a half years earlier came to an end. However, perhaps its most fundamental achievement, the transformation of much of the rural property of the country—particularly in the altiplano and the valleys leading down from it—to the Indians, remained intact. This fact was to be an important aspect of national politics and of the labor movement during the succeeding decades.

### **ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CENTRAL OBRERA BOLIVIANA (COB)**

With the triumph of the National Revolution a new central labor organization, the Central Obrera Boliviana (COB), was established. Guillermo Lora noted, "The COB was organized almost automatically on 17 April 1952. The inaugural session was convened by Juan Lechín and Germán Butrón, who were at the time ministers of mines and labor respectively. Miguel Alandis, Edwin Moller, and José Zegada, who through their tenacity had come to hold very important places in the labour movement, were responsible for the behind-the-scenes organization."<sup>10</sup> It soon came to encompass virtually all of the organized labor movement of Bolivia.

With the appearance of the Central Obrera Boliviana, all of the other central labor bodies, which had existed before April 9, 1952, soon disappeared. In the case of the Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores Bolivianos, it applied for affiliation with the COB, but its request was turned down on the grounds that it was affiliated with an international organization, the Communist-controlled Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina. Subsequently, the CSTB declared itself "in recess" pending the first congress of the COB. However, many, if not most, of its affiliates joined the COB, including the CSTB regional group in Cochabamba, which was temporarily captured by the Trotskyists, and all of its industrial workers' unions in La Paz. Some of the artisan organizations of the CSTB in La Paz became "dual members" of both the CSTB and the COB.<sup>11</sup> Although the CSTB headquarters in La Paz remained open for some time, and I visited it in 1952 and 1953, Trifonio Delgado Gonzáles noted that "it had no official burial, it just disappeared." He also said that subsequently a number of the CSTB leaders were jailed.<sup>12</sup>

The Federación Obrera Local also soon largely disappeared with the advent of the Central Obrera Boliviana. It seemed to revive for a short while after the 1952 revolution, in which members of the FOL fought for the revolution alongside other workers of La Paz, and together with its affiliate, the Federación Agraria Departamental, reopened its headquarters for the first time since 1947. However, almost immediately the Federación Agraria Departamental joined the COB without, at first, relinquishing its membership in the FOL. It soon lost all separate identity from the new peasant unions being organized under the aegis of the government and the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario. The construction workers of the FOL and most of the members of its tailors' union—the principal FOL wage earners' unions in the city



of La Paz—also joined the COB. By 1957 the only thing that remained of the FOL was the Federación Obrera Femenina, which consisted principally of petty trades in the markets of the city.<sup>13</sup>

As for the Confederación Boliviana de Trabajadores (CBT), which had been organized with the support of the Inter American Regional Organization of Workers (ORIT), after issuing a statement of support for the new trade union ministers in the revolutionary government, Juan Lechín and Germán Butrón, it put forth another resolution announcing its own dissolution. That statement read: "The Executive Committee, after conscientiously analyzing the present trade union situation, has resolved to declare the dissolution of the Confederación Boliviana de Trabajadores CBT; not without thanking in its name and in that of its continental and world superior organizations, all and each one of the comrades who, loyally and with sacrifice, collaborated with us in our tasks until the present moment."<sup>14</sup>

During the first few months of the existence of the Central Obrera Boliviana, the Trotskyists of the Partido Obrero Revolucionario played a major role in its affairs. This was due basically to two things: the way in which the *asamblea* of the COB was organized and the preoccupation of the most important leaders of the MNR in the labor movement with their dual roles as members of the new revolutionary government.

The *asamblea* of the COB consisted of "delegates" from the principal affiliates of the COB, that is, the miners, factory workers, white-collar workers, and railroad and allied workers, and from the various provincial departmental organizations of the Central Obrera. Since the *asamblea* met frequently, it was not possible for provincial organizations to send direct representatives to each meeting. Rather, they named residents of La Paz to be their delegates, and in the beginning a substantial proportion of these were Trotskyites.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, Juan Lechín, the head of the miners' federation, and Germán Butrón, leader of the Factory Workers Confederation, were ministers of mines and petroleum and of labor, respectively. Other important MNR labor leaders had other posts in the new regime. In the first months, apparently, they paid relatively little attention to the functioning of the COB.<sup>16</sup>

Trotskyist influence was shown in several ways. One was in *Rebelión*, the official newspaper of the COB, which first appeared in time for May Day and which published a document entitled "The Ideological Position of the Bolivian Working Class," which might have been written by Leon Trotsky himself. It proclaimed:

The Bolivian revolution must have the character of a combined revolution—bourgeois-democratic in its immediate objectives and socialist in its uninterrupted results. It is quite impossible to separate the two phases of the revolution; that means that the workers in power must not halt at bourgeois-democratic limits but must strike ever more deeply at the rights of private property, going over to socialist methods and in this way giving the revolution a permanent character.<sup>17</sup>

The editor of the first three issues of *Rebelión* was a Trotskyist, Miguel Alandía Pontoja.<sup>18</sup>

For a few months there was no clash between the Trotskyist orientation of the COB and the MNR labor leaders. However, such a clash did come in October 1952, when the Trotskyists had the COB send an "Open Letter to President Paz Estenssoro." Juan Rey, writing in the New York Trotskyist newspaper *Labor Action*, wrote of this document, which dealt with the impending nationalization of the Big Three mining companies, that it was "calling for nationalization without compensation and under workers' control and administration. It was a very good letter, written with socialist spirit, like the document 'The Ideological Position of the Bolivian Working Class.'"

The COB "Open Letter" ran clearly contrary to the government's plans for the nationalization of the Big Three, which were already widely reported. The government project, which had the support of the MNR labor leaders, called for some kind of compensation for the mining companies and, although providing for some kind of "workers' control" of the nationalized mines, did not propose that they be turned over completely to the mine workers.

Juan Rey recorded what happened at the next meeting of the *asamblea* of the COB. According to him, Lechín and Butrón carried out "a kind of coup d'état within the Central Obrera. A session of the Central was thereupon organized with a strong turnout by the Nationalists (who ordinarily do not participate in the sessions); and at this meeting they revoked and condemned the position on nationalization. . . . They then formed a new commission to draw up a new Open Letter to the president, with a Nationalistic majority on it."<sup>19</sup> In a subsequent article, Juan Rey said that the vote in the *asamblea* meeting had been 17 to 13.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, the MNR assumed full control of the COB. For some time thereafter, the trade union ministers—Lechín, Germán

Butrón, and Nuflo Chávez (minister of peasant affairs)—regularly attended COB meetings. The MNR also succeeded in getting six *oficiales* mayors—second position in the ministries—named as delegates to the *asamblea* of the COB. Edwin Moller, then the principal Trotskyist leader in the COB, claimed in 1953 that about 50 percent of the delegates were, in fact, government officials, named by outlying organizations to represent them in the COB.<sup>21</sup>

In July 1953 I was able to witness the extent of MNR control of a meeting of the *asamblea* dedicated to discussing the agrarian reform law that was to be promulgated within the next month. The meeting was presided over by Juan Lechín; minister of labor Germán Butrón, minister of peasant affairs Nuflo Chávez, and Juan Sanjinés, leader of the Railroad Workers Confederation and also a member of the MNR, were also on the platform.

Four reports on the agrarian reform were made to the meeting. One was by Hugo López Avila, the COB's representative on the Agrarian Reform Commission, and a second was by Nuflo Chávez, presenting the official MNR position on the issue. These two were very similar in content. A third report was presented in the name of Sergio Almaraz, secretary-general of the Communist Party, and argued for by José Pereira, and the fourth was by Edwin Moller, then the principal leader of the Trotskyist trade unionists.

Given the length of these reports, there was time only for José Pereira to speak extensively on the Communists' proposal. I recorded the reactions and behavior of the MNR labor leaders to Pereira's disquisition. I wrote:

Pereira's constant citing of the Communist authorities, and his occasional sallies against the MNR and the leadership of the COB brought smiles to the lips of most attending the session. At one point, Lechín actually laughed out loud. One had the impression that the MNR people, who really have the control of the COB in their hands, were being exceedingly tolerant of the actions of Almaraz and Pereira, as one would be tolerant of the activities of a precocious child, so long as he did no real damage. One had the impression that the reason the Communists could function as they did in this meeting was because they represented no real threat to the MNR group in control.

I also noted:

Chávez answered Pereira, and did so as a school teacher might talk to a child who hadn't learned his lessons quite well. He cited Marxian dialectic against the position of Pereira, and cited the real meaning of the nationalization idea, which was intended to give the state power to pre-

vent reestablishment of latifundia. He was at some pains to spell out the reasons why he thought that there should be nationalization of the land.<sup>22</sup>

## **ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF COB AND ITS AFFILIATES**

After the COB held its first congress in 1954, it had a more formal structure. The highest body in the organization was its National Workers Congress, which met in 1954, 1957, 1960, and 1962. Delegates to these meetings were chosen by the national organizations affiliated with the COB, as well as by the regional organizations of the COB set up in each of the country's nine departments. Members of the National Executive Committee and, after the 1956 elections, trade union members of the national parliament were also delegates to the National Workers Congress.

The day-to-day work of the COB was carried on by its National Executive Committee (CEN), elected at each COB congress. As one U.S. Department of Labor source noted: "The CEN carries out the resolutions of the national congress, administers finances, represents the COB in all public acts, and mediates conflicts among affiliates." The head of the CEN was the executive secretary, who from its foundation was Juan Lechín.

There also existed a National Assembly, made up of members of the CEN, the labor ministers in the government, and other specially designated representatives of COB affiliates. It was supposed to meet at least once a month.

The COB affiliates were organized on lines similar to those of the COB itself. The previously cited U.S. Department of Labor source said, "The organization of affiliates for the most part follows the organizational setup of COB, although each affiliate functions freely and determines its own rules. Generally, each union federation has its own national congress, national executive committee and regional bodies."

The COB and its affiliates were financed by dues "and private and governmental donations." The U.S. Labor Department source observed, "Dues are of necessity small and collection is haphazard." Checkoff of dues by the employers was legally possible but depended on arrangements individual unions made with the employers. "In practice, only a minority of the unions have made such arrangements."<sup>23</sup>

## EXPANSION OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT

In the wake of the National Revolution of April 1952 there was a rapid expansion of the labor movement. Germán Butrón, head of the Factory Workers Confederation and minister of labor, claimed in July 1953 that some 500 new unions had been established in urban and mining areas since April 1952. There had also been a massive expansion of the peasants' movement, which we discuss subsequently.

New national labor organizations covering workers in various parts of the economy were established, and preexisting ones took on new life. Butrón's own *Confederación General de Trabajadores Fabriles* had been established in October 1951, at which time, in spite of efforts of the government of the Junta Militar to purge the leadership of the factory workers' organization, the MNR won control of the organization. It played a major role in the insurrection of April 9-11, 1952.<sup>24</sup>

Regional organizations of the factory workers were also revived after the revolution. For example, the *Unión Sindical de Trabajadores Fabriles* of Tarija, which had been severely persecuted by the previous government, came to include most of the factory employees of that city, organized into eight different unions, most of them in the wood and allied industries, since Tarija was a center of the lumber industry.<sup>25</sup>

The miners' federation, which in the last few years had been forced to work largely clandestinely, was quickly revived. It established its temporary headquarters in the Ministry of Mines (presided over by Juan Lechín) and by August 1952 claimed to have some 80,000 members (certainly an exaggeration). All of the workers in the Big Three mines belonged, and the federation was carrying out a campaign to organize the workers in the small and medium-sized mines that remained in private hands. The local affiliates began negotiations with local mine managements to improve the situation of their members.<sup>26</sup>

In the early part of the National Revolution the miners' unions were able to obtain considerable improvement in their living conditions. There were gains in health services and notable advances in education, with schools being established where there had been none before. The schools in mining areas came to be regarded as better than most of those in the cities.<sup>27</sup>

The railway workers' confederation, the *Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores Ferroviarios y Ramos Anexos*, also rapidly recovered after April 1952. After the 1950 general strike it had been severely dealt with by the government, 300 leaders of the union being dismissed and, according to President Juan Sanjinés,

"[i]t had almost ceased to exist." However, after the Bolivian National Revolution, all of the workers who had been fired were returned to their jobs. Together with the miners' federation and the Factory Workers Confederation, it had the largest representation in the new COB.<sup>28</sup>

Subordinate organizations of the Railroad Workers Confederation were rehabilitated. One of these was the Sindicato Lloyd Aereo Boliviano, the union of the workers in the national airline. As in its parent organization, most of the leaders of the union had been dismissed by the government of President Urriolagoitia, and the workers who remained had formed a social club as a blind for the union. After the revolution, the union was revitalized, the dismissed workers were restored to their jobs, and the union shop was instituted.<sup>29</sup>

Several new national labor groups were established. One of these was the Confederation of Petroleum Workers, which was established soon after the revolution. It launched a campaign to bring all the workers of that branch of the economy into the organization.<sup>30</sup>

Another new organization was the Confederación Sindical de la Construcción, established in 1953. It was made up of regional federations in each department, which themselves consisted of local unions of the various building trades. This confederation faced a peculiar problem presented by the agrarian reform. Most of the construction workers were casual laborers who had recently migrated from the countryside, and with the launching of the agrarian reform quite a few of them returned to rural areas to participate in the land redistribution program.<sup>31</sup>

Still another new national labor group was the Federación Gráfica, uniting the country's printing trades workers. It was established in August 1952, and had regional federations in all of the nine departments affiliated with it. Waldo Alvarez, the veteran union leader who had been the first minister of labor in the government of President David Toro in 1936, was its first secretary-general.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, the bank workers established a national union organization in March 1953. It included the employees of commercial banks, social security funds, investment banks, and other similar institutions.<sup>33</sup>

Trifonio Delgado Gonzáles noted: "In all the mining, manufacturing and urban working-class centers there were reorganized not only unions but federations of workers. La Paz, as always in the vanguard in these activities, organized its Constituent Congress of what became the first Departmental Labor Center affiliated to the COB."<sup>34</sup>

Christopher Mitchell provided estimates of the membership of the largest national labor groups as of 1960. He credited the miners with 52,000 members, the factory workers with 28,000, the railroaders with 25,000, the construction workers with 18,000, the state and public employees with 12,000, and bus and truck drivers with 12,500.<sup>35</sup>

In spite of the expansion of the membership and strength of the labor movement, one peculiar characteristic of labor relations in Bolivia was not altered after the revolution. This was the fact that there was not a regularized system of negotiating collective contracts. The governments prior to 1952 had not encouraged such negotiations. Although in the mines individual unions did win increased wages and other concessions from the employers, even there such agreements apparently did not take the form of contracts having any semblance of official legality. In the case of the factory workers much the same situation prevailed, and it did not change substantially after the revolution. Negotiations dealt principally with grievances, and in the process of that, wage gains and other improvements were often achieved.<sup>36</sup>

## **POLITICAL ALIGNMENTS IN THE LABOR MOVEMENT**

During the early years of the Bolivian National Revolution, the labor movement was overwhelmingly controlled by the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario. However, there were two significant rivals to the MNR within the ranks of organized labor: the Stalinist Partido Comunista and the Trotskyist Partido Obrero Revolucionario. In addition, the Juventud Obrera Católica and the Catholic-oriented Partido Social Democrático were active, and in a few unions, including some factory workers' organizations in La Paz, and in the regional federation of the COB in Sucre, they were at least of some minor significance.<sup>37</sup>

In the beginning, there was some fear on the part of non-MNR elements in the labor leadership that the party in power was trying to establish a government-dominated labor movement. There were complaints that the MNR was trying to force all of the trade unionists to join the party.<sup>38</sup>

At first, some credence seemed to be given to this idea by the fact that the COB at its inception seemed to be on particularly friendly terms with the Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT) of Argentina, which was at that point thoroughly controlled by the government of President Juan Perón. There were COB representatives, headed by Germán Butrón, at a meeting in Asunción, Paraguay, sponsored by the CGT for the purpose of laying the groundwork for launching a hemisphere-wide Peronista labor

confederation. However, the Bolivians did not go along with the idea of launching such an organization, agreeing only to set up a committee to study the possibility of uniting all segments of the Latin American labor movement, without prejudicing the possibility that the COB might affiliate with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions or with the World Federation of Trade Unions and their regional affiliates in America.<sup>39</sup>

The issue of international affiliation of the COB was of some importance in the internal politics of the organization because of different positions favored by the different political groups operating within it. There may have been some Movimientistas who favored a close alliance with the Peronistas in the broader Latin American field. The Communists certainly favored affiliation with the Communist-dominated World Federation of Trade Unions and Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina, and perhaps some Trotskyists would also have favored that.

There were also some Movimientistas who had some friendly disposition toward the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and its American regional group, Organizacion Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores (ORIT).<sup>40</sup> These may have included Juan Lechin, although, as he explained to me, relations with the ORIT had been made very difficult by its efforts to organize what amounted to an anti-MNR trade union confederation in Bolivia during the last year or so of the Sexenio. Lechin had objected to those efforts in correspondence with Ernst Schwarz of the Congress of Industrial Organizations and at the time of the founding congress of the ORIT in 1951 had sent that meeting a long memorandum, urging that the ORIT adopt a different policy in Bolivia, but had received no reply to that document.<sup>41</sup>

The upshot of the discussion concerning international affiliation of the COB was that it stayed out of all international organizations. It sent "fraternal" delegates to meetings of international labor groups of different ideological orientations but did not affiliate with any of them.<sup>42</sup>

As we have noted, in the first few months of the existence of the COB, the Trotskyites appeared to be the principal challenge to MNR control of the organization. During that period at least, the Trotskyists undoubtedly looked upon themselves as playing the role of the Russian Bolsheviks in 1917 against the government of Kerensky, the POR being the Bolsheviks of Bolivia against the "Kerenskyist" government of the MNR.<sup>43</sup>

Juan Rey, although critical of the POR on some issues, reflected this point of view of many of the Bolivian Trotskyists when he saw the possibility of using the MNR labor elements as pawns to displace the government of Víctor Paz Estenssoro. As late as



October 1952, he wrote, "The 'labor ministers' in the cabinet, Juan Lechín and Butrón, who are both members of the MNR and leaders of trade unions, have to give their reports to the leading committee of the Central Obrera, so that this leading committee of the Central is virtually a dual government, an embryonic workers' government."

Rey concluded by saying, "The Nationalist regime, which is hanging on to power only because of the workers' support, will fall if this support is withdrawn. Therefore, an enormous responsibility rests on the Central Obrera and on the strongest group within it, the POR."<sup>44</sup>

This same viewpoint was reflected in my conversation in August 1952 with one of the secondary union leaders of the POR. He commented that it was not impossible that sooner or later there would come to power a government of the POR. He added that the COB had a POR majority, and its leaders "know where they are going." They were working with the left wing of the MNR, and it was not impossible, he said, that there would come a day when the Left, headed by Lechín, together with the POR, would take power.<sup>45</sup>

However, after October 1952, the national leadership of the COB was finally in the hands of the MNR, which had pushed aside most of the Trotskyists who had dominated it up until that point. Subsequently, the POR influence in the local unions and regional federations of the COB declined drastically.

Immediately after the National Revolution, the POR lost a good deal of its strength in the miners' federation. Although it still had some considerable influence among the rank and file and in local unions of the federation, it no longer had any representation in the Executive. However, by 1957, they had recovered considerable support, winning control of the Siglo XX and Catavi mine unions, and had substantial representation in the congress of the Federación Minera.<sup>46</sup>

The POR experienced a setback in February 1954, when the Confederación de Empleados Particulares (white-collar workers), of which Edwin Moller, a Trotskyist, was the president, called a general strike throughout Bolivia, apparently a move related to quarrels between the POR leadership in the national confederation and that of its La Paz affiliate, which was controlled by the MNR. The Movimientistas did not support the walkout, and the government declared it illegal. It soon collapsed.<sup>47</sup>

The POR suffered some of its severest losses in organized labor in Cochabamba, where it had been particularly strong in the months following the National Revolution, when it had normally between one-third and one-half of the delegates of the local COB

federation. By 1954, this representation had been reduced to about 10 percent, and the POR had lost virtually all of the extensive peasant support it had earlier in the revolution.<sup>48</sup>

The POR's position in the labor movement suffered a major blow in late 1954, when Edwin Moller and a considerable group of its other trade union leaders quit the party and joined the MNR, where Moller became a close associate of Juan Lechín, editor of the COB newspaper *Rebelión*, and in 1956 was elected an MNR member of the Chamber of Deputies.<sup>49</sup>

At the time of the National Revolution, in April 1952, the country's Communist Party (Partido Comunista) was relatively new, having emerged from the disintegration of the Partido de la Izquierda Revolucionaria only less than two years before. At the beginning of the revolution, its following in the ranks of organized labor was relatively limited.

In mid-1953, the Communists claimed to have substantial influence in the Railroad Workers Confederation, which had traditionally been dominated by the Partido de la Izquierda Revolucionaria, out of which the Communist Party was formed. However, none of the major figures of that union joined the Communist Party, and most of them ended up in the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario.

In 1954 the Communists claimed for the first time to have gained a foothold in the miners' federation and claimed that in a recent congress of the Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores Fabriles about a quarter of the delegates were Communists or party sympathizers. However, José Zegadas pointed out that they did not elect a single member of the Executive Committee of the confederación.<sup>50</sup>

During the first year of the revolution, the Communists sometimes aligned themselves with the MNR people within the labor movement, against the Trotskyists of the POR. They did so on the crucial issue of whether the law nationalizing the Big Three mining companies should provide for eventual compensation for the expropriated companies. However, by mid-1954, Sergio Almaraz, the secretary-general of the Communist Party, was claiming that the government was "moving in a fascist direction."<sup>51</sup>

## CO-GOBIERNO AND CONTROL OBRERO

Two innovations were introduced by the revolutionary government that were of particular significance for organized labor. These were *co-gobierno* ("co-government") and *control obrero* ("worker control").

With the establishment of the revolutionary regime, it was announced that it was to be a "co-government" of the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario and the Central Obrera Boliviana. The COB was to be free to name several members of the government and was to share decision-making power within the regime with the government party.

In the beginning there were three ministers named by the COB: minister of mines and petroleum Juan Lechín, minister of labor Germán Butrón, and minister of peasant affairs Nuflo Chávez. Speaking to me about the labor ministers four months after the revolution, Juan Lechín insisted that the union leaders had not at first wanted to enter the government and had done so only "on the insistence of the organized workers and of all groups which had participated in the events of April 9." He professed not to want to stay as minister for very long, citing among other reasons the dangers that the position provided for becoming corrupt.<sup>52</sup>

However, these protestations were somewhat disingenuous. With the formation of the COB, the presence of ministers chosen by the Central Obrera Boliviana took on the nature of a pact between the labor and nonlabor members of the MNR.

James Malloy said of the co-government:

One theoretical pillar of *co-gobierno* was the old medieval Spanish concept of "Fuero Sindical." Based on this concept, the COB asserted the jurisdictional autonomy of labor within the functional realm of its primary interest. In effect, this means the entire economy. "Co-government," in turn, was further based upon two concessions. The first was a guaranteed number of labor ministers in the national cabinet. At first, the number was three, but was later pushed to five. The labor ministers were chosen by the COB and functioned as its representatives in the official state government. The COB also received guaranteed representation in the party's executive organs. The second concession of importance was the granting of control obrero in the mines, which gave the COB a powerful voice in the management of the economy.<sup>53</sup>

Malloy added: "The COB actually became the real government of Bolivian labor, and through it, the economy. Indeed, it had all the symbolic and functional characteristics of a sovereign-like entity, including executive, deliberative and judicial organs; a defined area of authority and constituents; and most important, armed forces. The COB allied itself with the MNR, but from a basis of independence, and only in return for guaranteed corporate status within the official state government."<sup>54</sup>

*Co-gobierno* remained a characteristic, at least ostensibly, throughout the twelve and a half years of the revolutionary gov-

ernment. However, after the first major showdown between the MNR government and the COB leadership (or part of it) at the beginning of the administration of President Hernán Siles in late 1956–early 1957, the power of the relationship between the two partners shifted increasingly toward the party leadership and away from that of the labor movement.

*Control obrero* or worker control, was an arrangement whereby workers' representatives were given some degree of control over some state-owned industries—and in some cases, control of the workplace. It was thoroughgoing in the mining industry but also existed to some degree in other state-controlled sectors of the economy.

In the case of the mining industry, *control obrero* was part of a decree nationalizing the Big Three tin companies. In that case, it was *control obrero con derecho al veto*, that is, "worker control with the right to veto." Two of the seven members of the Board of Directors of the new state mining company COMIBOL were chosen by the miners' federation. But more significant, in each mine a *control obrero* was elected, who had, according to James Malloy, "in addition to an advising and decision-making capacity, the power to veto decisions deemed inimical to the interest of the mines and the miners."<sup>55</sup>

One of the more militant leaders of the mine workers' federation explained to me at one point how this system worked. He said that the *control obrero* was consulted in all aspects of running the mine. He was a member of the local committee charged with running the individual mine, the other members representing the management. He had a veto over anything proposed by the management. If he vetoed something, the issue went up to COMIBOL, where there was also a *control obrero* for the whole company, which likewise had veto power. If he exercised his veto, the issue went to the minister of mines—Juan Lechín—who was also executive secretary of the miners' federation. The *control obrero* had the right at any time to see the books of the firm.<sup>56</sup>

In his report to First Congress of the COB in October 1954, Juan Lechín sketched the role that he attributed to *control obrero*. He said that it

means that the production of more than eighty per cent of our foreign exchange is under the supervision of the workers, their unions and the FSTMB. . . . In Bolivia, workers' control has acquired a really revolutionary and democratic meaning. . . . The introduction of the right of veto puts the responsibility into the hands of the workers for the administrative policy of the mines. . . . This right has existed for more than a year now and that experience has convinced even its most staunch opponents that workers' control is the best defence of the workers' interests, the

best guarantee of economic progress, and the best safeguard against the bureaucratisation of the COMIBOL.<sup>57</sup>

There is no doubt that the existence of *control obrero* complicated the task of running COMIBOL. In 1957, the general manager of the corporation, a Netherlander, outlined to me the nature of the problem. He claimed that originally the *control obrero* was intended to provide workers' control over all expenditures of the company but that most of the workers' control people had interpreted their job differently, seeing themselves as "super trade union leaders." However, he did admit that a minority of them were "of great help" in running the mines.<sup>58</sup>

One particularly sensitive aspect of the role played by many of the workers' control people was the effort of some of them to bring about the dismissal of managerial and technical people whom they accused of "mistreating" the workers. In such cases, the *control obrero* would appear before the assembly of the local union, and if, as often happened, it endorsed his charges against the individual involved, the *control obrero* would officially demand the firing of the engineer or technician concerned.<sup>59</sup> Understandably, this had a demoralizing impact on the other supervisory and technical personnel. This was particularly difficult from the point of view of the management of the mines, because at the time of nationalization of the Big Three, virtually all of the foreign supervisory and technical personnel had been withdrawn by the expropriated companies, their place being taken by Bolivians, most of whom had not had adequate training for assuming the management of the mine.

There was undoubtedly considerable variety in the way in which workers' control functioned in different mining regions. One former *control obrero*, in the ex-Aramayo Quechisla mines in the southern part of the country, commented to me that he had been virtually co-manager of the mines there, paying particular attention to social questions but also checking on purchases and sales and other matters. He sought consciously, he said, not to be a "super *sindicato* representative" as, he claimed, the workers' control people in many other mines did.<sup>60</sup>

In the case of the Huanuni mine in the Oruro area, the former secretary-general of the union claimed in 1957 that since a more extremist administration had been replaced in that union a couple of years before, the *control obrero* had largely confined himself to supervising the financial aspects of the enterprise. He added that he tried to cooperate with the management insofar as possible.<sup>61</sup>

The COMIBOL was the only state enterprise in which *control obrero* was so extensive. However, in the various other government-owned firms, the unions were given the right to name some members of the Boards of Directors. These included the petroleum enterprise Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales Bolivianos (YPFB), the airline Lloyd Aereo Boliviano, and the Central Bank. In the last of these, the Confederación Bancaria at first resisted the suggestion that it name someone to the Board of Directors, fearing that to do so would imperil the political neutrality the union was trying to maintain. However, the executive secretary of the confederation was finally named to the board of the Banco Central in 1955.<sup>62</sup>

### PEASANT UNION ORGANIZATION

From a historical perspective, the most fundamental change brought about by the Bolivian National Revolution was its returning of the rural land in the altiplano and valleys leading down from it to the Indian peasants. This action was a reversal of what had been going on for more than 400 years and has been one of the longest-lasting aspects of the revolution. In conjunction with this agrarian reform process, there developed a very extensive network of rural *sindicatos*; and from 1952 on the rural unions were considered a part of the Bolivian labor movement.

The traditional landholding pattern in this altiplano and the valleys to the east, which had developed during the colonial period and largely persisted in independent Bolivia until the National Revolution, was based on large landholdings principally owned by whites and mestizos. These were cultivated by Indian peasant tenants. The Indians were granted small plots on which to grow crops for their own sustenance. They paid their "rent" for this land in labor service. They were required to work several days a week on the portion of the estate that the landlord used for generating his own income. They also periodically had to give personal service to the landlord, working as servants in his house or as servants in the house the landowner maintained in the nearest urban center. Although this gratuitous personal service (*pongueaje*) had theoretically been abolished by the Villarroel administration, it still, in fact, continued to exist until 1952.<sup>63</sup>

The revolutionary government established the Ministry of Peasant Affairs, to which was transferred virtually every government function dealing with the peasants. Thus, purely agricultural matters, rural education, rural health services, and various other matters were under its jurisdiction.

One of the major functions of the Ministry of Peasant Affairs in the first few years of the revolution was to prepare the ground for, and then put into execution, the agrarian reform. The argument has been made by some foreign observers of the Bolivian National Revolution that the MNR had not originally intended to launch an agrarian reform but was forced to do so by the peasants.<sup>64</sup> However, Víctor Paz Estenssoro pointed out that as early as the Villarroel period, he and Walter Guevara Arce had unsuccessfully introduced a bill in congress to amend the constitution to make agrarian reform possible. In the 1951 election campaign, the MNR had promised an agrarian reform, and in his first speech after returning home to assume the presidency in April 1952, Paz Estenssoro had announced the nationalization of the Big Three mines and agrarian reform as two fundamental objectives of the revolutionary government. The fact that the MNR came to power with the intention of carrying out a broad agrarian reform was confirmed to me by Walter Guevara Arce.<sup>65</sup>

Carter Goodrich, who headed the United Nations (UN) Economic Mission to Bolivia during the first years of the revolution, was also convinced that the MNR government intended to carry out a massive land redistribution program from the time it came to power. He emphasized the need to prepare for this by first organizing the Indian peasants on a large scale, which explained why the agrarian reform was not officially decreed until August 1953.<sup>66</sup>

Two things were necessary before the agrarian reform program could be carried out. One of these, of course, was the elaboration of an agrarian reform law. The other was the organization of the peasants, to make it possible for them to participate actively in the land redistribution program.

The Ministry of Peasant Affairs began a massive campaign of establishing peasant unions throughout the country. In this effort, considerable use was made of miners who had come from rural areas and had experience in the mines with unionization and who now returned home in large numbers to help organize unions among the rural workers.

In fact, during the first year or so of the National Revolution, the organizers of the Ministry of Peasant Affairs helped to establish three kinds of peasant organizations: *sindicatos*, local units of the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario, and local militia groups. Often the officers of the new unions and MNR branches were the same people.<sup>67</sup>

During the first year of the National Revolution, there was some seizure of land by the peasantry, particularly in the region of Cochabamba and in some areas bordering Lake Titicaca. The

Trotskyists of the POR played a major role in that activity, particularly in the Cochabamba area.<sup>68</sup>

On August 2, 1953, the agrarian reform law was officially promulgated at Ucureña, an area in the Department of Cochabamba where a peasant union had functioned (with great difficulty) ever since 1936. The decree provided for expropriation of all large landholdings that had been cultivated in the traditional way; proclaimed that the peasants as of that day became proprietors of the segments of land that their landlords had let them use for the maintenance of their families; and provided for the ultimate division of the rest of the holdings among those same tenants. It also provided for the return to the surviving Indian communities of land that neighboring landlords had stolen from them.<sup>69</sup>

With the enactment of the Agrarian Reform Law, the role of the rural *sindicatos* became twofold. In the first place, they were to cooperate with the Servicio Nacional de Reforma Agraria in the process of the division of their former landlords' estates. In the second place, they were in the meanwhile to negotiate with those landlords, pending the redistribution of the estates, concerning the wages and other emoluments the peasants were to receive for cultivating the land the landlords still held.

The role of the peasant *sindicatos* as collective bargaining agents with the landlords varied a great deal from one part of the country to another. In some areas, the *sindicatos*, in fact, ran off the landlords and effectively took over their holdings. In others, the peasants refused to work the land that remained in the formal possession of the landowners. In still others, the peasant unions did engage in collective bargaining over wages and other working conditions until the National Agrarian Reform Service completed the process of carving up the old estates.

Christopher Mitchell has stressed another key role of the peasant unions once they were well established. Noting that by the late 1960s there were approximately 7,500 such unions "reaching virtually every local administrative unit in the nation," he said that they "provided a channel through which reform peasants deal with the central government. The often amazingly slow process of obtaining land titles, the search for assistance from La Paz (schools, teachers, roads, water), the training of votes for political favors—all these tasks in political linkage were handled by the sindicato."<sup>70</sup>

The agrarian reform process moved slowly, largely due to a lack of sufficient surveyors and other technicians needed to carry it out and to the slow-moving bureaucracy of the Servicio Nacional de Reforma Agraria. Ex-minister of peasant affairs Nuflo



Chávez estimated in early 1960 that about 85,000 peasant heads of the families had by then been given titles, involving what he thought to be about 20 percent of the total land area to be distributed.<sup>71</sup> However, the land redistribution process in the highlands and valleys of Bolivia was irreversible, and with the passage of time, virtually all of the land in those parts of the country had been turned over to the Indian peasants.

Meanwhile, the rural union movement came to be regarded as an integral part of the country's labor movement. A National Peasants Confederation was established, which by 1956 claimed to have as many as 800,000 members (although certainly that was a considerable exaggeration). It affiliated with the COB.<sup>72</sup>

In the early years of the National Revolution, the peasant movement was overwhelmingly Movimientista, as its origins might suggest, and for some years its militia constituted one of the major elements of force supporting the MNR regime. However, as peasant control over the land became more extensive and more secure, the peasant movement tended increasingly to come under the influence of *caciques*, leaders of local unions or groups of unions that became the principal centers of trade union and political influence in the rural areas. As a group, many of these *caciques* lost their close association with the MNR and became increasingly willing to tolerate, if not support, any national regime that would assure the peasants the continued control of the land.

### **THE FIRST CONGRESS OF THE CENTRAL OBRERA BOLIVIANA**

With the establishment of the COB, a committee was set up to organize the First Congress of the new organization. However, two and a half years were to pass before that First Congress actually met. Guillermo Lora claimed that the congress was not held "until the MNR had succeeded in removing most of its opponents from leadership positions in the unions."<sup>73</sup>

On October 30, 1954, the First Congress of the COB began its sessions, which went on until November 17. It was very amply financed, the government having decreed that each employer in the country should send the equivalent of one day's pay for each of his workers to the Central Obrera Boliviana for the purpose of the congress.

There were 310 delegates to the First COB Congress, which held most of its sessions in the building of the Chamber of Deputies and Senate, since those bodies did not function during the first four years of the National Revolution. Virtually every part of the wage-earning population of the country was represented. The

largest delegations were those of the miners (60 delegates), peasants (50 delegates), factory workers (30 delegates), and railroad workers (20 delegates).

Sitting on the dais of the opening session of the congress were Juan Lechín, Germán Butrón, Edwin Moller (ex-Trotskyist recently turned Movimientista), and José Zegada. Also there was President Víctor Paz Estenssoro, although he apparently did not speak at the opening session.

The agenda of the nearly three-week-long meeting consisted of the report of Juan Lechín as executive secretary of the COB, adoption of a Declaration of Principles of the Central Obrera Boliviana, organizational problems, the statutes of the COB, international relations of the Bolivian labor movement, resolutions, miscellaneous matters, and finally the election and installation of the new Executive Committee of the Central Obrera Boliviana.

In his inaugural report of the congress, Juan Lechín touched on many points, including *co-gobierno*, *control obrero*, the organization of the peasants by the Ministry of Peasant Affairs, and the structure and functioning of the COB. He ended by paying homage to President Víctor Paz Estenssoro, who he said was "our banner of struggle, our guide and our maestro; the man who, on triumph of the revolution, knew how to be loyal to his people and who has fulfilled loyally and honestly the postulates of the revolution."<sup>74</sup>

The Declaration of Principles adopted by the congress proclaimed "the inevitable decay of the capitalist system and its indisputable consequences: the world triumph of socialism" but then went on to denounce both the Stalinists and the Trotskyists. It asserted, "The COB supports the traditional strategic line of the revolutionary Marxism in laying down as the fundamental task of the international proletariat the achievement of strong international unity to impose socialist peace and victory, with the suppression of all exploitation of man by man.

This statement proclaimed: "Our revolution is national and popular. The consequent transformation of the struggle for national liberation being waged by the people of Bolivia into the struggle for social liberation, depends on the revolutionary capacity of the working class in close alliance with the poor peasants and exploited sectors of the urban middle class."<sup>75</sup>

The statutes adopted by the congress for a complex series of institutions constituted "a vast chain of organizations of the masses starting with the base sindicatos, up to the National Executive Committee." However, Delgado González noted that the scheme of organization "remained lyrical theoretical proclama-

tions because so far, twenty-five years later, the trade union organization laid out in the plans and norms . . . have not been carried out."<sup>76</sup>

At the final working session of the congress a twelve-man Executive Committee was elected. Juan Lechín was chosen as executive secretary and received the largest number of votes of all those elected. Among the other members of the new body were Germán Butrón of the factory workers; Nuflo Chávez; Juan Sanjinés of the railroad workers; Mario Torres of the miners' federation; and Baldomero Castell of the construction workers.<sup>77</sup>

At the closing session of the First Congress of the COB the principal speakers were Juan Lechín and President Víctor Paz Estenssoro. The latter noted:

There is something more that should be underscored among the conclusions that an outside observer—which I was personally with regard to your deliberations—has been able to draw, and that is the ability, the capacity, not only of the trade union leader, but of a true Statesman, with which Comrade Lechín has known how to direct the deliberations of the Congress. The workers have in him an authentic leader. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the honors that you have given me. All these resolutions and decisions will be the object of most careful study on the part of the government.<sup>78</sup>

## THE ECONOMIC CRISIS OF 1956–1957

In 1956 the administration of President Víctor Paz Estenssoro came to an end. Elections were held. In the MNR convention to name its candidate for president, Juan Lechín, speaking for the COB, put forth the names of Hernán Siles and Nuflo Chávez for president and vice president.<sup>79</sup> They were subsequently elected, as was a new congress, in which trade union leaders constituted a majority of the members of the Chamber of Deputies, and included three peasant leaders who spoke hardly any Spanish.<sup>80</sup>

With the advent of the new administration of the MNR, the Bolivian National Revolution faced a major crisis. The organized labor movement was at the center of that crisis.

The cause of the crisis was the lamentable state of the overall Bolivian economy by the end of the Paz Estenssoro administration. Rampant inflation that had driven up prices since 1952 by somewhere around 1,945 percent and 3,593 percent (depending upon the source of the estimate) was one of the aspects of the economic crisis most visible to the average Bolivian.

Another feature of the economic situation was a crazy quilt of different exchange rates between the boliviano and the dollar. Officially, a "single rate" of exchange of 190 bolivianos to the dollar

had been established by the Paz Estenssoro government in 1953. However, by the middle of 1956 the "free rate" of the boliviano was 14,000 to the dollar.

The exchange rate and general economic situation were complicated by the fact that the government had given special exchange privileges to a wide variety of groups, permitting them to purchase dollars at the "official" rate of 190 bolivianos, regardless of what the free market rate was. George Eder estimated that such privileges were available to about 80,000 of the country's 600,000 heads of families.<sup>81</sup> These special exchange privileges, which were popularly known as *cupos*, were given to mine commissaries, which based their prices on the "official" rate, to various other union groups, and to a variety of other institutions.

This *cupo* system generated massive black markets and smuggling of goods out of Bolivia. Thus, as one union leader told me subsequently, the miners, whose base wages had changed little, were working more for their commissary privileges than for their wages—buying goods at extremely low prices and selling the bulk of them in the free market for vastly higher prices.<sup>82</sup>

Another aspect of the situation was a mounting shortage of ordinary consumer goods. Merchants increasingly held goods off the market in expectation of the ever-mounting price increases. As a consequence, women found it necessary to get up before daylight to get in line to try to purchase the goods necessary for their households, and there appeared the phenomenon of people who got places in those lines not because they wanted to buy but in order to sell those positions in line to other women who were relative latecomers.<sup>83</sup> The situation was often made more frustrating when, after standing for long hours in line, the women found that when they had gotten at the head of the *cola* (line) there were no goods left to buy.

This situation gave rise to extensive corruption. As Edwin Moller, ex-Trotskyist and close associate of Juan Lechín, told me, too many leaders of the labor movement and the MNR took advantage of the situation for their own personal benefit.<sup>84</sup>

The artificially low prices created by the *cupo* system led to massive smuggling of goods out of Bolivia. Thus, one textile factory owner in La Paz told me subsequently that he had had massive sales to the market women of La Paz of the textiles used to make their clothing, most of which those same market women promptly took across the border to Peru, where they could sell them at a magnificent profit—and that these same goods had not sold at all after the installation of the stabilization program that was initiated late in 1956.<sup>85</sup> Another indication of the prevalence of this kind of smuggling out of Bolivia was the establishment in

La Paz of a "Sindicato de Viajeras de Arica a La Paz," made up of market women engaged in smuggling goods to Arica, Chile.<sup>86</sup>

Trifonio Delgado Gonzáles described the situation thus:

The economic situation of the country was disastrous because of the galloping and uncontrollable monetary inflation. Every six or three months the government decreed new wage scales, wage corrections and readjustments; new prices for articles of prime necessity and strict rationing. It established the "family identification card" and the organization of block chiefs . . . to facilitate the distribution of rice, sugar, kerosene, bread, oil and cooking fats. In the face of these efforts, there appeared a sindicato of "cuperos" (from the word "Cupo" or quota coined by the populace during this period) who used the articles of prime necessity freely selling them through a chain of "black markets" that brought about rapid and illicit enrichment.<sup>87</sup>

## **ORGANIZED LABOR AND THE STABILIZATION PROGRAM**

Before leaving office, President Víctor Paz Estenssoro had recognized the gravity of the problem. In conjunction with the U.S. economic aid mission, he had brought in a special economic "adviser," George Eder, to try to deal with the problem. On Eder's advice, he had established a Stabilization Council, authorized to draw up a program to resolve the situation.<sup>88</sup>

Eder was a quite orthodox economist who had little sympathy for the Bolivian National Revolution and who, in conjunction with a mission from the International Monetary Fund, drew up a Draconian stabilization program. It involved establishing a single foreign exchange rate, ending most subsidies by the government of various segments of the economy, and reining in drastically the government's economic development program. Perhaps the politically most sensitive part of the program was adjusting prices in the mine commissaries so that goods were sold there at market prices instead of the highly subsidized ones that had been current. General onetime wage increases, not only for the miners but for all wage and salary earners, were provided for, but they only partially offset the expected price increases under the stabilization program.

When the stabilization program was presented to congress by the newly inaugurated president Hernán Siles, neither Vice President Nuflo Chávez nor senate president Juan Lechín, the two key labor members of the "co-government" at the beginning of the Siles administration, gave any indication to the labor members of congress, who made up a substantial part of the membership of both the senate and the Chamber of Deputies, that they should vote against the program.<sup>89</sup> However, subsequently both Chávez

and Lechín came out strongly against the program once it had been put into operation.

George Eder, who had consulted with Juan Lechín at various stages of developing the stabilization program, was certainly convinced after these meetings that Lechín was in support of it. In his book, Eder gives verbatim a pledge that Lechín gave "with great emotion" in one of the last meetings of the Stabilization Council before the program went into operation:

I am part of the government, and the action of the government will be my action and, although I may not be in agreement, I shall cooperate with all my strength and decision, and not merely in a passive attitude. Mr. Eder may be sure that not only I, but likewise all of the labor union leaders of the MNR, will take that attitude because we have placed our confidence in Dr. Siles and we have more confidence in his decisions than in our own proposals.<sup>90</sup>

The impact of the stabilization program, once it was put into effect in December 1956, was dramatic. With abolition of *cupos* and other subsidies, prices at first went up drastically, in many cases considerably more than the wage increases that had been enacted as part of the program, although the situation varied greatly among different groups of workers. Those who had benefited from the *cupo* system suffered most, while other groups that had not previously received *cupos* suffered less, if at all. For instance, in the case of construction workers, who had not had *cupos*, the 100 percent wage increase provided for them left them in about the same situation as before, as prices also went up about 100 percent.<sup>91</sup>

Undoubtedly, the miners suffered most from the stabilization program. As one mine union leader explained to me, although the miners received a 200 percent wage increase, that was not enough to make up for the increase in prices in the mine commissaries, where prices, particularly of imported goods, rose drastically, to reflect the fact that the commissaries now had to pay 8,000 bolivianos for each dollar, instead of the 190 bolivianos they had paid before stabilization.<sup>92</sup> The miners no longer received "supplements" to their wages from selling goods bought at very low prices in the commissaries at high prices in the black market.

Within a few months prices leveled off and in some cases actually began to decline. Meanwhile, the stabilization program largely did away with the massive smuggling of goods out of Bolivia that had previously prevailed.

But the impact of stabilization (along with price increases) that was most often cited to me by labor leaders at the time was

the disappearance of the long line of people seeking to purchase goods. As if by magic, virtually everything was suddenly available once again, albeit at much higher prices.<sup>93</sup>

Once the stabilization program went into effect, with the obvious pain it inflicted on some segments of workers, Lechín, Nuflo Chávez, and a substantial part of the labor leadership came out in opposition to it. In conversation with me in July 1957, Lechín claimed that he had been one of the first to demand an end to inflation and that he was therefore not opposed to stabilization per se but only to the plan "which was drawn up by Mr. Eder and accepted by President Siles." He professed at that point to see the main errors in the plan to be its cutting off of most of the government's economic development projects and its failure to resolve the financial and economic problems of COMIBOL, the government mining firm. General economic development and, specifically the modernization and reequipping of the COMIBOL mines were, he claimed, the only way really to deal with the inflation problem. Only with increased production of the economy could price increases be kept in check.<sup>94</sup>

The controversy over the stabilization program brought about a serious schism in organized labor. This began with the Second Congress of the Central Obrera Boliviana, which began on June 2, 1957, and lasted for two weeks. Although the Second Congress had a long agenda, clearly the principal issue on the minds of the delegates was that of the stabilization program.

Among those addressing the opening session of the congress was President Hernán Siles, who spoke for almost an hour. He was clearly there to defend the stabilization program. He commented:

When we confronted the need to detain the inflation, the panorama was unfortunate. There was clearly a gradual loss of the confidence of the masses in the fruits of their labor, which were reduced as the devalued money undermined effort and the faith in the benefits created by their own effort; there was no regime that could for long enjoy their support. The facts of the national economy that prevailed at that moment constitute a starting point in judging the work of stabilization in its true dimensions.

Siles went on to say that if the situation had continued, the exchange value of the dollar would have reached 30,000 bolivianos, "generating contraband, speculation and immorality . . . of frightful proportions. The cities of the country would have remained without food, or clothing, or facilities, because all would have outside the frontiers of the country, seized by the greed of the contrabandists."<sup>95</sup>

Siles said, "It is impossible that the violent change would not provoke criticism. First off, those people who had become accustomed to dealing in cupos, living from the traffic in foreign exchange, would have to object to stabilization. They are the legions of those now inconvenienced who demand the return of their lost privileges."

He concluded by saying that the government was now ready "to attack the disequilibria in the acquisitive power of wages . . . for the purpose of improving the conditions of life of the working classes."<sup>96</sup>

Juan Lechín in effect answered the president on the next day. He said that the COB was not demanding abandonment of stabilization but its modification "to increase the purchasing power of wages and salaries, defend national industry and commerce, and the state economic structure that had arisen since the Victory of April."<sup>97</sup>

On June 13, President Siles spoke again to the COB Second Congress. He said, "I am not disposed under any conditions or pressure to return to the inflationary policy." He invited the COB to establish a commission of distinguished economists to study "whether it is possible to have an increase in compensation within the lines indicated by the COB and particularly Comrade Lechín, and which will not increase the exchange rate of the dollar, and will not bring a return to the inflationary process."<sup>98</sup>

Subsequently, the COB congress did name a commission to study the wage issue, which body, if no solution could be found, was authorized to become a Strike Committee.<sup>99</sup> This was in spite of the fact that in Lechín's report to the second session of the congress he had denounced the "strike school, the abuse of the strike instrument that should be used only in certain conditions and as last resort."<sup>100</sup> At its final session, the congress set July 1, 1957, as the day for a general strike if no agreement had been reached with the government on drastic modifications of the stabilization program.<sup>101</sup>

The election for a new Executive Committee for the COB indicated serious splits in its ranks. No representatives of the railroad, factory, and construction workers were named to the new body.<sup>102</sup>

With the closing of the congress, a number of unions began adopting resolutions against the general strike. One of the first of these was by the Confederation of Bank Workers, which resolved

1) to declare that the bank workers of Bolivia are in disagreement with the resolutions adopted at the II National Congress of Workers insofar as the Plan of Monetary Stabilization is concerned; 2) to support with de-



cided and unbreakable solidarity, the program of Monetary Stabilization sponsored by Dr. Hernán Siles Zuazo, Constitutional President of the Republic, notifying our most vigorous moral and material support, with the security that the deficiencies which are present will be repaired insofar as the possibilities of the country permit.<sup>103</sup>

Among the national unions that took a similar position were the petroleum workers, construction workers, railroaders, and white-collar employees. Meanwhile, President Siles had declared a hunger strike in protest against the decision of the COB congress, which rallied widespread popular support for his position from trade unionists and others.

Two of the labor ministers in the *co-gobierno*, Mario Torres and Félix Lara, resigned from the cabinet in protest against President Siles' refusal to yield on the stabilization issue. Vice President Nuflo Chávez, who was also executive secretary of the peasants' confederation, the Confederación de Trabajadores Campesinos, also resigned. Probably to his surprise, Chávez's resignation was accepted by congress, in which union leaders constituted a majority.<sup>104</sup> However, the railway workers' leader, Ramón Claure, who was minister of transportation, did not resign.<sup>105</sup> He explained to me at the time that he saw no real alternative to the stabilization program, and certainly Juan Lechín and the others who were demanding that the program be drastically modified had not come up with any viable alternative.<sup>106</sup>

Undoubtedly, one aspect of this split among the nation's union leaders was their previous political affiliations before they had joined the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario. After the April 1952 revolution, most union leaders who had previously belonged to the Partido de la Izquierda Revolucionaria and the Partido Obrero Revolucionario, pro-Stalinist and Trotskyist, respectively, had joined the MNR. For example, Juan Sanjinés, head of the Railroad Workers Confederation and a longtime member of the PIR, said some years later that he had joined the MNR on the day the National Revolution began, April 9, 1952.<sup>107</sup> In the 1957 split in the COB, those who had formerly been Trotskyists (such as Edwin Moller) or who were still Trotskyists supported Lechín and his defiance of the stabilization plan, while those who had come out of the PIR supported President Siles and the stabilization program.<sup>108</sup>

Finally, the only major union group that held out for the strike was the mine workers' federation (although some of the local miners' unions, including that of Huanuni near Oruro and those in mines in the southern part of the altiplano expressed

support for the stabilization program).<sup>109</sup> President Siles decided to go to the mines to try to convince the workers personally. He first went to Oruro, where he talked to a crowd of 10,000 people and got wide support. When he retired for the night to one of the nearby mining camps, he heard himself being denounced on a radio station in Catavi and being threatened that if he went to Catavi, he would be "greeted with dynamite." So the following day he went to Catavi and rallied wide support, and most of the "militant" local leaders were nowhere to be seen.<sup>110</sup>

In the end, the July 1 strike was called off by the COB Executive.<sup>111</sup> However, some modifications were subsequently made in the stabilization program. The most significant of these were a decree reducing by 12 percent the prices of four commodities of prime necessity and an increase in subsidies to the social security system. However, no general wage increase such as had been demanded by the COB was enacted.<sup>112</sup>

The crisis brought leadership problems both in the COB and in its affiliated unions and in the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario. In the case of the Confederación Sindical de Empleados Particulares, the white-collar workers' organization, which supported stabilization, an *ampliado* (plenum) was held with delegates from affiliates from all the departments of Bolivia, which passed a resolution requesting the resignation of Edwin Moller, the ex-Trotskyite who had joined the MNR, become a close associate of Juan Lechín, and strongly opposed the stabilization program, as head of the organization. He and others associated with him in the confederación complied with this request.<sup>113</sup>

Within the COB as a whole, the group of unions that had opposed the general strike on July 1 and that were not represented in the Executive Committee elected at the Second Congress of the Central Obrera, demanded a reorganization of the leadership of the COB. Leaders of the building trades, railroaders, air transport workers, chauffeurs, petroleum workers, bank employees, telecommunications and postal workers, and telegraphers issued a statement that demanded "[t]he restructuring of the executive committee of the COB. The resignation of the present executive committee. A united trade union movement, the definitive disappearance of 'phantom leaders,' consultation with the base unions. The suspension of the *amplios* of the COB."<sup>114</sup>

These demands were ignored by Lechín and others in the COB Executive Committee. It was not until August 1960 that a new Executive Committee was established with Juan Lechín still as executive secretary, but with representatives of the building trades, bank employees, and others who had until then been excluded, among its members.<sup>115</sup>

However, the labor leaders opposed to Lechín's position did succeed in getting the COB put on record supporting stabilization and the Siles government. In November 1957, the COB, with thirty-seven of its member groups supporting it and twenty-two in opposition, adopted a resolution that in part said:

The adventuristic tactic of a duality of powers, imported into our revolution, must be rejected, recognizing that the revolutionary process must develop under the undisputed direction of the MNR. The working class will give the party support, with criticism, conditioned upon the fidelity and capacity that it demonstrates to carry out the principles of April. . . . The workers stand behind the second Government of the Revolution and struggle for the accomplishment of all its objectives.<sup>116</sup>

During the 1957 crisis a conflict also arose within the MNR. Soon after the frustrated general strike, President Siles brought about the installation of a new party Executive Committee containing a majority of his supporters and without many of the trade union leaders who had opposed him and the stabilization program. This new Executive Committee proceeded to expel from the party a number of the principal supporters of the general strike, among them Edwin Moller. However, the old Executive Committee refused to recognize the existence of the new one.<sup>117</sup> That split in command was overcome considerably before the end of Hernán Siles' presidential term in 1960.

## **ORGANIZED LABOR FROM 1957 TO 1960**

The resolution of the crisis of late 1956 and early 1957 did not put an end to labor unrest. This was stressed by minister of labor Aníbal Aguilar Peñarrieta, who, upon giving up his post in 1960, noted that "in his incumbency of two years he had had to deal with 3,400 strikes, most of them illegal, which had driven into bankruptcy 1,140 factories, with evident damage for the working class."<sup>118</sup>

As might have been expected, the Siles government's stabilization program, with its freezing of wages, abolition of subsidized mine commissaries, and other features, continued to be a constant source of discontent and strikes. Even unions that had supported the president in 1957 subsequently struck on issues directly or indirectly involving stabilization.

The most varied groups of workers participated in this strike wave. In August 1958 the railroad workers went out, demanding substantial wage increases.<sup>119</sup> In August 1959, the country's schoolteachers walked out, also demanding salary increases, and received a pledge of aid from the mine workers' federation.<sup>120</sup>

Some strikes involved issues other than wages and allied problems. For instance, in September 1959 the Federation of Health Workers struck in protest against a move by the MNR to bring about the dismissal of people working in the public hospital system who would not join the party.<sup>121</sup>

One of the strangest walkouts during this period occurred in March 1958, to demand that President Siles withdraw his resignation of the presidency. Siles had taken that step when Lechín attacked him for proposing "a program of economies . . . to strengthen a little the battered finances of the country." Thirteen unions in La Paz declared themselves on strike until the president withdrew his resignation. As a consequence, "La Paz was a dead city without transport and without an infinity of indispensable services, without commerce." When a delegation of strikers went to Siles' home to urge his withdrawal of his resignation, he finally conceded and was carried on the shoulders of those and other workers back to the presidential palace.<sup>122</sup>

The most serious walkout of this period was a general strike called in the mines in March 1959. This strike reflected the growing influence of the Marxist parties—the Communists and the Trotskyist POR—in the miners' ranks. They, to a considerable degree, had dominated the Ninth Congress of the miners' federation in July 1958.

A subsequent conference of the miners in February 1959 decided to launch a general strike if its demands for a 31.5 percent wage increase were not accepted by the COMIBOL and the government. A strike committee headed by César Lora, brother of the Trotskyite leader Guillermo Lora, with its headquarters in Oruro, was chosen to call and lead the strike.

The walkout was finally called for March 3, 1959. Juan Lechín and Mario Torres urged its postponement, in order to permit them to negotiate further with the government, which the strike committee rejected. When the walkout took place, it centered largely on the mines near Oruro, although even there the Huanuni mine workers did not participate, nor did many of the miners in the more southerly mines. On March 16, the Executive Committee of the miners' federation (from La Paz) called the walkout off, when the government agreed to a 20 percent wage increase backdated to October 1, 1958, and continuation of subsidized low prices for a list of items in the mine commissaries pending completion of a study of the issue by COMIBOL and the unions.<sup>123</sup>

In spite of the "settlement" of the 1959 general miners' strike, walkouts continued to occur at various mines. In October 1959, Guillermo Bedregal, president of COMIBOL, and Goosen Broesma, its general manager, issued a report in which they said

that recent mine strikes had cost the state mining firm over \$4 million in lost production and sales.<sup>124</sup>

Discontent grew among the unions that had supported Siles in the 1956–1957 crisis. This was most notable among the factory workers. When, in January 1959, the La Paz organization of the factory employees, the Unión Sindical de Trabajadores Fabriles, demanded the resignation of minister of labor Abel Ayoros Arandona, who was also secretary-general of the national Factory Workers Confederation, and he refused to quit, there was an “insurrection within the confederation. Christopher Mitchell noted that “the fabriles’ fourth national congress in March voted to replace the entire leadership, an event unprecedented in the usual Bolivian pattern of self-perpetuation and only gradual change in the syndical hierarchy.”<sup>125</sup>

Another characteristic of the 1957–1960 period that was to have grave consequences in the future was growing schisms within the labor movement. This not only involved the alignments that had characterized the 1956–1957 crisis but divisions within particular unions on a local level.

Such schisms were particularly notable in the mining unions and among the peasants. In the mining camps there existed two different types of militia—those of the unions and those of the MNR. As some of the important local unions came under the control of left-wing parties hostile to the MNR, the union militia came under their influence, while the MNR militia remained loyal to the party and to the government.

In its Ninth Congress in July 1959, the miners’ federation demanded the dissolution of the MNR militia.<sup>126</sup> However, that did not take place, and there began to be some armed clashes between the two militia groups. For instance, in January 1960 there was a clash between union and MNR militia at the Huanuni mine that resulted in the death of at least twelve people and the wounding of twenty-nine others.<sup>127</sup>

In the case of the peasant unions, the problem was somewhat different. By the late 1950s there had emerged a number of *caciques*, leaders of local peasant unions who, with firm control over their own followers, sometimes came into conflict with one another over a variety of issues. The best known of these *caciques*, José Rojas, leader of the peasant union of Ucureña in the Department of Cochabamba, was named minister of peasant affairs by President Siles in March 1959.<sup>128</sup>

In some of the labor disputes of the period, strikers took prisoner members of the management of the firms involved, as a means of bringing pressure upon those enterprises. Thus, in the Soligno textile plant in La Paz, in a dispute as to whether the firm

should pay workers their wages for the days in which they had recently been on strike, the workers kept as hostages the company's lawyers who were negotiating the issue. An agreement was finally reached providing that the firm would pay the wages for the strike period, whereupon the lawyers were released.<sup>129</sup>

## THE 1960 ELECTION

The approach of the 1960 elections provoked a new crisis within the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario. The left wing of the party, including virtually all of the leadership of the Central Obrera Boliviana, was opposed to the most obvious MNR candidate, Walter Guevara Arce, who had served under Paz Estenssoro and Siles as minister of foreign affairs and minister of government, respectively.

Given this crisis within the party leadership, the MNR turned to ex-president Víctor Paz Estenssoro, who had served as ambassador to Great Britain during the Siles administration. When it was then proposed that Guevara Arce be Paz Estenssoro's running mate for vice president, both President Siles and Paz Estenssoro opposed this. At that point, Walter Guevara Arce broke away from the MNR and formed his own Partido Revolucionario Auténtico (PRA), and in the election he became the principal opposition candidate.<sup>130</sup>

The COB leadership was crucial to the renomination of Víctor Paz Estenssoro in 1960. In return for COB support, Juan Lechín was named as the MNR's vice presidential nominee, "which assured him [Paz Estenssoro] of a victory at the polls," according to Guillermo Lora. The Communist Party endorsed the Paz-Lechín ticket.<sup>131</sup>

## LABOR IN SECOND PAZ ESTENSSORO ADMINISTRATION

During the first three years of the second Paz Estenssoro administration, there was relative labor peace. Christopher Mitchell commented:

Reading the political correspondence and newspapers for the years 1960-1963, one is struck by the mildness and relative influence of the attacks from factional leaders, principally Lechín, upon Paz's regime. Before December 1963 labor disputes were far less frequent than they had been under Siles. Not only was general labor peace maintained, but when Vice President Lechín intervened in such strikes as took place, he did so as an arbitrator who was either impartial or actually favorable to the government's position.<sup>132</sup>

However, during Paz Estenssoro's last year, serious trouble developed, particularly in the mining industry. Víctor Paz Estenssoro had returned to office determined to do something about the government's ailing mining firm, the Corporación Minera de Bolivia. It was a financial disaster by 1960, and its output had been declining steadily since 1952. In the report of Guillermo Bedregal and Goosen Broersma to which we have already referred, they pointed out that, with production levels of 1952 at 100, production of COMIBOL had declined to 85.7 in 1953, 71.2 in 1954, 68.3 by 1955, 71 by 1956, 63.5 in 1957, and 53.9 in 1959.

The causes of this decline were many. Certainly, the withdrawal of virtually all of the foreign technical and managerial staff was one. Another was the wearing out of many of the more important mines and the failure to open up new and more productive ones. A third was the antiquated equipment in the mines. A fourth was the COMIBOL's failure—perhaps inability—to import sufficient replacement parts. A fifth was the existence of excess employment in the mines, arising from the decision of the MNR government in 1952 to reemploy all of those miners who had been dismissed for trade union or political reasons during the Sexenio.<sup>133</sup> Finally, the chaotic state of labor relations in the mines was also a major element in the poor record of COMIBOL.

Soon after returning to power, Paz Estenssoro launched the so-called Triangular Plan. According to James Malloy, this plan was "an international effort . . . in which the United States, West Germany and the Inter American Development Bank would provide the capital and expertise to reorganize the industry. The plan envisaged heavy capital investment, the pioneering of new mineral resources and a 'rationalization' of the existing administrative structure." From 1961 to 1964, Bolivia received \$205 million in economic aid from the United States and \$23 million from the Inter American Development Bank, much of the funds going to finance the Triangular Plan.<sup>134</sup>

From a macroeconomic point of view, the Triangular Plan and Paz Estenssoro's general emphasis on economic development seemed to be bearing fruit. The Bolivian economy grew 5.7 percent annually between 1961 and 1964, compared to only 1.5 percent during the Siles administration.<sup>135</sup> However, from the miners' point of view, this progress was not so evident.

In the beginning, Juan Lechín and other major leaders of the mine workers' federation strongly supported the Triangular Plan, "while the Marxists attacked it fiercely." Thus, at the Eleventh Congress of the miners' federation at Huanuni in May 1961, Lechín said, "Some time ago the workers were realistic enough to argue that capital must be found for Comibol, no matter where

the credit came from. Thus, if Comibol obtains credit somewhere it is adopting a progressive attitude that cannot be regarded as counterrevolutionary. For this reason we must support the plan. Some hotheaded leaders are trying to push the workers into an isolationist position."<sup>136</sup>

At the May 1962 Third Congress of the COB, Juan Lechín still gave at least qualified support to the Triangular Plan. According to Guillermo Lora, "Lechín was sure that the Triangular Plan would save the mining industry, and he only objected to some defects in its application."<sup>137</sup>

However, by the time of the Twelfth Congress of the miners' federation at the end of 1963, the situation had changed substantially. Guillermo Lora recorded that, apparently without the opposition of Juan Lechín and other union leaders hitherto associated with the MNR, at this meeting "The POR's denunciation of the anti-worker, pro-imperialist nature of the government was approved without amendment, as its rejection of government attempts to destroy the unions and of the economic measures imposed by the Triangular Plan."<sup>138</sup>

Clearly, those aspects of the Triangular Plan designed to "rationalize" the management of COMIBOL were what brought on an open clash between the miners' federation (and with it, much of the rest of the labor movement) and the second government of Víctor Paz Estenssoro. James Malloy sketched the essence of this "rerationalization" process: "The plan proceeded from the assumption that, to become solvent, COMIBOL had to scale down the labor component of its cost input. Translated, this meant (a) an abandonment of purely 'social' activities, for example, unproductive mines, pulperías [government-supported stores], etc., (b) an adjustment of wages to productivity levels, and (c) a cutback in the workforce. In addition, the plan demanded that the principle of management authority be established, which in effect meant putting an end to control obrero."<sup>139</sup>

Increasingly, there were clashes between the government and the miners. These reached crisis proportions when, late in 1963, "the government ordered massive layoffs in the mines; in Catavi Siglo XX alone, about one thousand miners received notices."<sup>140</sup>

As might have been expected, this decision aroused strong opposition in the affected mines, particularly in Siglo Veinte and Catavi, where moves to resist the move were by two left-wing local leaders, Irineo Pimentel and Federico Escobar. The government had Pimentel and Escobar arrested.

In reprisal, some of the Siglo Veinte miners took seventeen people prisoner, including the mine manager (a young Dutchman) and four Americans, including Bernard Rifkin, the member of the



U.S. economic aid mission charged with developing labor programs. Those holding the prisoners treated them very well, although threatening that if army troops or peasant militia attacked the mining camp, as was being threatened, those being held prisoner would be killed.

Somewhat frantic negotiations took place, with Juan Lechín, who came to the mine and conferred with the prisoners, taking a leading role, to obtain the release of the captives. Finally, Lechín got Pimentel and Escobar themselves to send a written message to the local union urging that the prisoners be released. After holding their prisoners for ten days, the unions at Siglo Veinte and Catavi voted overwhelmingly to free those being held.<sup>141</sup>

In April 1964, the Central Obrera Boliviana submitted a long memorandum to President Paz Estenssoro that set forth the position of the labor movement led by Juan Lechín. It started out by setting forth the hopes of, and promises to, the workers at the time of the revolution of April 1952 but then said: "Twelve years after these promises, the working class and the people see, with dismay and indignation how these promises of national Liberation have been converted into the vilest of hoaxes; how on the blood of the martyred workers colossal fortunes have been built, how instead of progress and happiness, backwardness is consolidated reinforcing the chains of our dependency, based on hunger and restoration of the whip of our oppressors."

This memorandum set forth forty-five demands by the COB. These included such things as massive wage increases, release of imprisoned labor leaders, reestablishment of *control obrero* with the right of veto, and a large number of other matters.<sup>142</sup>

However, the COB had lost much of its cohesion and vigor. One leader of the oil workers' organization told me in August 1963 that efforts to hold a plenum of the COB a few months before had failed when a quorum could not be achieved in five successive tries. He also claimed that union leaders opposed to the Lechinistas had formed a group known as the Comité Democrático to represent those unions not aligned with Lechín.<sup>143</sup>

The Confederation of Railway Workers remained a center of opposition to Lechín within the COB. Efforts by Lechín to bring about the ouster of Juan Sanjinés in elections in that confederation failed in 1963. Also, given the fact that a majority of the members of the Chamber of Deputies were trade unionists, it was of some significance that Juan Sanjinés was elected president of that body.<sup>144</sup>

## THE 1964 ELECTION AND OVERTHROW OF THE MNR GOVERNMENT

The increasingly acute tension between the second Paz Estenssoro government and organized labor, particularly the miners' federation, was part of the background to the overthrow in November 1964 of the government of the MNR and thus the more or less official end of the Bolivian National Revolution. But there were several additional factors behind the coup of November 1964.

One of these was the election of 1964. As Paz Estenssoro said to me a year and a half later, Juan Lechín had been promised the MNR's presidential nomination in that election, and as Paz Estenssoro said, "he was the logical candidate." However, faced with the possibility that Lechín might become president, the U.S. Embassy and the international banks, which had been aiding Bolivia with the Triangular Plan, indicated (according to Paz) that aid would cease were Lechín to become president. The military leaders, too, came to Paz to indicate that "it would be better that Lechín not be the candidate."<sup>145</sup>

As a consequence, Victor Paz Estenssoro decided that he would run for a third term. The constitution had been altered in 1961 to make this possible.<sup>146</sup> Paz's decision provoked another major split in the ranks of the MNR. Juan Lechín, with most of the mine workers' leadership and some other trade unionists, broke away to form a new party, the Partido Revolucionario de la Izquierda Nacionalista (PRIN).

Another factor in the overthrow of the MNR regime was the changed status of the Bolivian military. The army had first been abolished right after the MNR triumph of April 1962. When it had been reconstituted a year or so later, its leadership was supposedly carefully chosen from the ranks of those either belonging to, or known to be friendly to, the MNR, and during Paz Estenssoro's first administration it had mainly been kept at work on economic projects.

One Venezuelan Acción Democrática exile who worked closely with the Bolivian government's colonization plan in the eastern part of the country told me in 1956 that at that time the army had only about 8,000 members in contrast to 18,000 before April 1952. Some 2,000 were employed in helping with the colonization program in the altiplano, and only about 3,000 were "in the barracks."<sup>147</sup>

The change in the status and employment of the military began during the Siles administration, in large degree because of U.S. influence. An important official of the International Coopera-

tion Administration, the U.S. foreign aid organization at that time, told me in 1957 that the U.S. policy then was to "de-emphasize" the peasants and the miners, which meant to disarm them, and to try to build up both the army and the *carabineros*. As he expressed it, "there has to be a force in the country to counterbalance the campesinos who may sweep down at any time and undo everything."<sup>148</sup> Between 1961 and 1964, the United States provided \$12.4 million to reequip the Bolivian army.<sup>149</sup>

Christopher Mitchell sketched the reorganization of the army as a military force that began under Siles. He wrote:

The Siles government gave the army the internal organization and national tasks that were to condition its political role for at least the next 15 years. In 1957, the military establishment was reorganized, and three new posts created: those of commander-in-chief (supreme commander responsible only to the president), commander of the army, and commander of the air force. And in 1960, just before leaving office, Siles presided at the opening of a School of Higher Military Studies, intended to broaden the sociological and development background of colonels destined for further promotions.<sup>150</sup>

The process of building up the army as a counterforce to the peasant and workers' militia went on through the Siles and second Paz Estenssoro administrations. Paz Estenssoro was not unaware of the dangers of this situation and sought to obtain better arms for the peasant militia, who he felt were still generally loyal to the government. He placed orders for arms with the Fabrica Nacional de Armas of Argentina, but at the last moment the Argentine military refused to allow them to be delivered. Thus, as Paz Estenssoro told me, the peasant militia were armed with weapons dating from the Chaco War, while the army had current U.S. arms.<sup>151</sup>

One U.S. government source noted in 1962, "In 1960, the workers' militia was probably at least twice as large as the Regular Army but had fewer arms, little or no training and little discipline. The New Bolivian Constitution of August 6, 1961, incorporated the militia into the Regular Army as reserves."<sup>152</sup>

The growing political strength of the armed forces was made evident at the beginning of the 1964 presidential election campaign. The MNR convention had named a civilian MNR leader, Federico Fortún Sanjinés, as Paz Estenssoro's vice presidential running mate. However, shortly afterward, the military forced the resignation of Fortún and the substitution of General René Barrientos, chief of the air force and head of the MNR's "military cell," as candidate for vice president.<sup>153</sup>

President Paz Estenssoro was reelected and took office for the third time in August 1964. However, by that time many forces and individuals were conspiring against the MNR regime. Among the individuals involved were ex-president Siles and Juan Lechín.<sup>154</sup> Guillermo Lora said, "It was, in fact, the greatest error of Lechín's political career to support the generals who conspired against the Paz Estenssoro government in 1964. . . . His support for the military was based on the mistaken opportunist calculation that they would hand over power to him."<sup>155</sup>

Lora summed up the situation between the beginning of Paz Estenssoro's third term and his overthrow. He wrote that "opposition politicians kept calling on the barracks and appealing to the Generals to make a revolution for them."<sup>156</sup>

According to Víctor Paz Estenssoro, the factor that made the generals finally decide to move against him was their discovery of the weakness of the peasant militia, which had preoccupied them as an armed force that might thwart any army move to overthrow the president. They found this out when, in the last weeks of October 1964, there were riots and armed demonstrations in both La Paz and some mining centers. The president met with General Alfredo Ovando, the commander of the army, to exchange information concerning army and peasant militia units available to deal with these situations. When the army leaders found out, as a result of this, that the peasant militia were weaker than they had supposed, they decided finally to move against Paz Estenssoro.

Peasant militia had been called into La Paz in October but had left the city by the beginning of November. According to Paz Estenssoro, November 2 was the Fiesta of the Dead, which the Indians celebrated by going to the cemeteries, taking flowers, and then drinking heavily that night. That was the main reason, Paz Estenssoro maintained, for the fact that when, on November 3, he sent fifty trucks to the countryside to mobilize peasant militia, only one came back with militiamen. In any case, Paz Estenssoro doubted that peasant militia could have defeated the much better armed soldiers of the army.<sup>157</sup>

When the generals finally moved on November 4, the Paz Estenssoro government was defenseless. Paz was conducted to the airport in the altiplano above La Paz and flew off into exile in Peru.

The overthrow of President Paz Estenssoro and the MNR government can be seen as the more or less formal end of the Bolivian National Revolution. Although that revolution's most significant accomplishment, the granting of the land to the Indians, was never reversed, the sometimes unhappy coalition that had ruled the country from 1952 to 1964—the MNR, the labor move-

ment, and the organized peasantry—definitely came to an end. For the next quarter of a century, neither the political parties nor the organized workers nor the organized peasants nor the civilians in general were to rule the country—that role was reserved to the armed forces.

## NOTES

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2. See Fellmann Velarde, op. cit., pages 253–262 for a description of the “coup” to displace President Urriolagoitia.

3. Interview with Agapito Monzón, onetime leader of Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario in Oruro, ex-subsecretary of economy in government of President Banzer, in New Brunswick, NJ, October 9, 1974.

4. Robert J. Alexander, *The Bolivian National Revolution*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ, 1958, pages 44–45; Trifonio Delgado Gonzáles, *100 Años de Lucha Obrera en Bolivia*, Ediciones Isla, La Paz, 1984, page 206.

5. See Liborio Justo, *Bolivia: La Revolución Derrotada*, Editorial Serrano Hermanos LTDS., Cochabamba, 1967, pages 168–169 for a description of the ceremony of nationalization of the Big Three mining companies.

6. For texts of the universal adult suffrage decree, mine nationalization law, agrarian reform law, and educational reform act, see *La Revolución Nacional a Través de Sus Decretos Mas Importantes*, La Paz, April 9, 1955.

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8. Interview with Edwin Moller, onetime leader of Partido Obrero Revolucionario and leader of Central Obrera Boliviana, in Maiquitia airport, Venezuela, August 14, 1978.

9. Christopher Mitchell, *The Legacy of Populism in Bolivia: From the MNR to Military Rule*, Praeger, New York, 1977, page 93.

10. Guillermo Lora, *A History of the Bolivian Labor Movement*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1977, page 281.

11. Interviews with Bernabé Villarreal, member of Executive Committee of Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores Bolivianos, in La Paz, August 14, 1952; and Sr. Nuñez, member of Executive Committee of Federación Obrera Sindical, in La Paz, July 9, 1953.

12. Delgado Gonzáles, op. cit., pages 201, 210.

13. Interviews with Ismael Vertiz Blanco, secretary-general of Federación Obrera Local, in La Paz, August 14, 1952, and Catalina Mendoza, secretary-general of Sindicato de Floristas of Federación Obrera Local, in La Paz, August 14, 1952, July 7, 1953, and August 22, 1956; see also

*Los Constructores de la Ciudad: Tradiciones de Lucha y de Trabajo del Sindicato Central y Albaniles 1908-1980*, Taller de Historia Oral Andina (THOA), UMSA, La Paz, May 1986, pages 68-73.

14. Delgado Gonzáles, op. cit., pages 200-201.

15. Interview with Guillermo Limpías Villegas, president of Sindicato Bancario de La Paz, in La Paz, July 11, 1953.

16. Guillermo Lora objects to this explanation for Trotskyist influence in the early COB without offering a clear alternative; see Lora, op. cit., page 283.

17. Juan Rey, "The Bolivian Revolution Goes Left," in *Labor Action*, New York, October 27, 1952, page 6.

18. Liborio Justo, op. cit., page 160.

19. Juan Rey, "Coup of MNR's Labor Henchmen in the COB," in *Labor Action*, New York, November 3, 1952.

20. Juan Rey, "Bolivian Revolution Turns Right," *Labor Action*, December 8, 1952.

21. Interview with Edwin Moller, op. cit., in La Paz, July 10, 1953.

22. Robert J. Alexander, "Impressions of Meeting of Central Obrera Boliviana, July 9, 1953" (manuscript).

23. *Labor Law and Practice in Bolivia*, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Washington, DC, 1963, page 18.

24. Interview with Germán Butrón, head of Confederación General de Trabajadores Fabriles and minister of labor, in La Paz, July 11, 1953.

25. Interview with Jaime Queiróz, member of Executive of Unión Sindical de Trabajadores Fabriles de Tarija, in New Brunswick, NJ, March 9, 1954.

26. Interview with Modesto Castillo, recording secretary of Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros de Bolivia, in La Paz, August 15, 1952.

27. Interview with June Nash, professor of anthropology, New York University, in New Brunswick, NJ, March 31, 1971.

28. Interview with Juan Sanjinés, executive secretary of Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores Ferroviarios, in La Paz, July 10, 1957.

29. Interview with José Rico, secretary-general, Sindicato Lloyd Aereo Boliviano, in Cochabamba, July 27, 1954.

30. Interview with Aonio Tellez Herrero, member of Executive of Petroleum Workers Confederation of Bolivia, in New Brunswick, NJ, March 14, 1954.

31. Interview with Baldomero Castell, member of Executive of Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores de Construcción, in New Brunswick, NJ, March 19, 1954.

32. Interview with Julio González, secretary-general, Sindicato Gráfico de La Paz, in La Paz, July 8, 1953.

33. Interview with Guillermo Limpías Villegas, op. cit., July 9, 1953.

34. Delgado Gonzáles, op. cit., page 211.

35. Mitchell, op. cit., page 44.

36. Interviews with E. Fernando Asturizaga L., delegate of Unión Sindical de Trabajadores Fabriles to Central Obrera Boliviana, in La Paz, August 13, 1952; Modesto Castillo, op. cit., August 15, 1952; Baldomero Castell, op. cit., March 19, 1954; Germán Butrón, op. cit., July 11, 1953.

37. Interviews with Raúl A. Terán Armaza, a leader of Juventud Obrera Católica, in La Paz, August 15, 1952, and Humberto Martínez D., representative of Sindicato Gráfica of Sucre in Federación Gráfica of Bolivia, in La Paz, July 8, 1953.

38. Interviews with Walter Alva, secretary-general of Sindicato de Teléfonos Automáticos of Cochabamba, in Cochabamba, July 28, 1954; and Luis Aramayo, recording secretary of Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores Ferroviarios y Ramos Anexos, in La Paz, August 13, 1952.

39. Interviews with José Zegada Terceros, recording secretary of Central Obrera Boliviana in La Paz, August 13, 1952; and Juan Lechín, executive secretary of Miners Federation and minister of mines and petroleum, in La Paz, August 14, 1952.

40. Interview with Germán Butrón, op. cit., July 11, 1953.

41. Interview with Juan Lechín, op. cit., August 14, 1952.

42. Interview with Pío Nava, member of Executive of Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Miners, delegate to COB, in La Paz, July 9, 1953.

43. Interview with Edwin Moller, op. cit., August 14, 1978.

44. Juan Rey, "The Bolivian Revolution Turns Left," op. cit.

45. Interview with Luis Pérez, Trotskyist leader in Tailors' Union, in La Paz, August 14, 1952.

46. Interviews with Edwin Moller, op. cit., in La Paz, July 10, 1953, July 30, 1954, July 20, 1957; and with E. Fernando Asturizaga L., op. cit., August 13, 1952.

47. Interview with Richard Bloomfield, labor, mining, and petroleum officer, U.S. Embassy, in La Paz, July 30, 1954.

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49. Interview with Edwin Moller, op. cit., in La Paz, August 22, 1956.

50. Interviews with Sergio Almaraz, secretary-general of Partido Comunista de Bolivia, in La Paz, July 9, 1953, and July 24, 1954; and José Zegada Terceros, op. cit., July 29, 1954.

51. Interviews with Sergio Almaraz, op. cit., July 9, 1953, and July 24, 1954.

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53. James Malloy, *Bolivia: The Uncompleted Revolution*, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 1970, pages 185-186.

54. Ibid., page 187.

55. Ibid., pages 177-178.

56. Interview with Ireneo Pimentel Rojas, ex-president of Sindicato Minero Llallagua-Catavi, in New Brunswick, NJ, March 14, 1954.

57. Lora, op. cit., page 295.

58. Interview with Goosen Broersma, general manager, Corporación Minera de Bolivia, in La Paz, July 12, 1957.

59. Interview with Alberto Echalar, safety engineer of Corporación Minera de Bolivia, in La Paz, July 12, 1957.

60. Interview with Noel Vázquez, ex-control obrero of Consejo Central Sud of Federación Minera, in La Paz, July 24, 1957.

61. Interview with Celestino Gutiérrez, ex-secretary-general of Sindicato Minero Huanuni, in La Paz, July 23, 1957.

62. Interviews with René Gómez García, executive secretary, Confederación Bancaria de Bolivia, in La Paz, July 26, 1957; Antonio Tellez Herrero, op. cit., March 14, 1954; and José Rico, op. cit., July 27, 1954.

63. Sr. Rivas, secretary-general of Sindicato Central Agrario Ucureña, in Ucureña, July 27, 1954, gave me a particularly graphic description of the old regime.

64. Roger Rasnakek, professor of anthropology, Goucher College, speaking at a meeting of Middle Atlantic Council on Latin American Studies, in Baltimore, March 16, 1985; see also Mitchell, op. cit., pages 45, 51; Jerry Knudson, *Bolivia: Press and Revolution 1952-1964*, University Press of America, New York, 1986, page 261; Richard Patch, "Bolivia: Diez Años de Revolución Nacional," in *Cuadernos*, Paris, September 1962.

65. Alexander, 1994, op. cit., pages 30, 91-92.

66. Interview with Carter Goodrich, professor of economics at Columbia University, head of United Nations Economic Mission to Bolivia in 1952 and after, in Chapel Hill, NC, September 5, 1963.

67. Interviews with Nuflo Chávez, minister of peasant affairs, in La Paz, July 11, 1953, Alvaro Pérez del Castillo, minister of peasant affairs, in La Paz, August 22, 1956.

68. Interviews with Pedro Franco, peasants' defender of Ministry of Peasant Affairs in Cochabamba, in Cochabamba, in July 26, 1954.

69. See *La Revolución Nacional a Través de sus Decretos Mas Importantes* for the text of the Agrarian Reform Decree.

70. Mitchell, op. cit., page 46.

71. Interview with Nuflo Chávez, op. cit., in Maracay, Venezuela, April 25, 1960.

72. Interview with Augusto Malavé Villalba, exiled Venezuelan labor leader, organizer of Organización Interamericana de Trabajadores (ORIT), in Buenos Aires, May 23, 1956.

73. Delgado Gonzáles, op. cit., page 207; Mora, op. cit., page 290.

74. *Primer Congreso Nacional de Trabajadores: Discursos*, Central Obrera Boliviana, La Paz, 1954, pages 33-76; see also Delgado Gonzáles, op. cit., page 230.

75. Delgado Gonzáles, op. cit., pages 235-236.

76. Ibid., pages 239, 240.

77. Ibid., pages 241.

78. Ibid., pages 242-243.

79. Lora, op. cit., page 302.

80. Interview with Baldomero Castell, op. cit., August 21, 1956.

81. George Jackson Eder, *Inflation and Development in Latin America: A Case History of Inflation and Stabilization in Bolivia*, Bureau of Business Research, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1968, page 22.

82. Interview with Felipe Aguilera, secretary-general of Consejo Central Sud of Empresa Minera Quechuela, in La Paz, July 24, 1957.

83. Interview with Baldomero Castell, op. cit., July 11, 1957.

84. Interview with Edwin Moller, op. cit., July 20, 1957.

85. Interview with Domingo Saíd, owner of SAID textile plant in La Paz, in La Paz, July 12, 1957.



86. Interview with Cornelius Zondag, former economic adviser to Bolivian government, in Tempe, AZ, March 15, 1978.
87. Delgado Gonzáles, op. cit., page 250.
88. For a general view of the Bolivian economic crisis, see Eder, op. cit., pages 21-83.
89. Interview with Federico González, leader of Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros, in La Paz, July 15, 1957.
90. Eder, op. cit., page 221; see also Mitchell, op. cit., page 58.
91. Interview with Baldomero Castell, op. cit., July 11, 1957.
92. Interview with Alberto Jara, conflicts secretary, Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros, in La Paz, July 15, 1957.
93. Interview with Alberto Tarifa, official of Sindicato Mefubol, in La Paz, July 22, 1957; see also interviews with Baldomero Castell, op. cit., July 11, 1957; Juan Sanjinés, op. cit., July 10, 1957; Edwin Moller, op. cit., July 20, 1957.
94. Interviews with Juan Lechín, op. cit., July 30, 1957.
95. Delgado Gonzáles, op. cit., page 29.
96. Ibid., page 260.
97. Ibid., page 266.
98. Ibid., page 274.
99. Ibid., page 275.
100. Ibid., pages 264-265.
101. Ibid., page 280.
102. Interview with Domingo Alberto Rangel, Venezuelan Acción Democrática exile, member of Planning Commission of Bolivia, in La Paz, July 11, 1957.
103. Delgado Gonzáles, op. cit., pages 278-279.
104. Mitchell, op. cit., page 70.
105. Delgado Gonzáles, op. cit., page 380.
106. Interview with Ramón Claure, a leader of Railroad Workers Confederation and minister of transportation, in La Paz, July 24, 1957.
107. Mitchell, op. cit., page 28.
108. Interview with Edwin Moller, op. cit., July 20, 1957.
109. Interviews with Celestino Gutiérrez, op. cit., July 23, 1957, and Noel Vázquez, op. cit., July 24, 1957.
110. Interview with Domingo Alberto Rangel, op. cit., July 24, 1957.
111. Lora, op. cit., page 309, and Delgado Gonzáles, op. cit., pages 283-284.
112. Interview with Enrique Andre Zambrana, former leader of Federación Gráfica, official of Caja Nacional de Seguro Social in Cochabamba, in La Paz, July 7, 1957.
113. Interview with Genaro Linares, secretary-general of Federación Nacional de Gastronómicos, in La Paz, July 23, 1957.
114. Delgado Gonzáles, page 287.
115. Ibid., page 290.
116. Mitchell, op. cit., pages 69-70.
117. Interview with Edwin Moller, op. cit., July 20, 1957.
118. Delgado Gonzáles, op. cit., page 288.
119. *El Diario*, La Paz, August 12, 1958.

120. *Presencia*, La Paz, August 14, 1959.
121. *El Diario*, La Paz, September 3, 1959.
122. *Ultimas Noticias*, Mexico City, March 7, 1958.
123. Lora, op. cit., pages 210–220.
124. *Presencia*, La Paz, October 25, 1959.
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126. Lora, op. cit., page 313.
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128. Juan de Onís, "Bolivian Militias Called in Strike," *New York Times*, March 15, 1959.
129. *Ultima Hora*, La Paz, November 20, 1958.
130. Malloy, op. cit., pages 241–242.
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132. Mitchell, op. cit., page 89.
133. Interview with Jorge Salazar, president of Banco Minero, in La Paz, August 24, 1956.
134. Malloy, op. cit., page 299, and Mitchell, op. cit., page 85.
135. Mitchell, op. cit., page 92.
136. Lora, 1977, op. cit., page 322.
137. *Ibid.*, page 323.
138. *Ibid.*, page 326.
139. Malloy, op. cit., page 299.
140. *Ibid.*, page 301.
141. Interview with Bernard Rifkin, former labor projects director of International Cooperation Administration Mission in Bolivia, in Highland Park, NJ, December 23, 1963.
142. *El Diario*, La Paz, April 17, 1964.
143. Interview with Rodolfo Guzmán Yanes, member of Executive Committee of Sindicato de Trabajadores Petroleros de Empresas Particulares de Bolivia, in Ciudad Satélite, Estado de Mexico, Mexico, August 17, 1963.
144. Interview with Feliberto Gutiérrez, member of Executive Committee of Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores Ferroviarios de Bolivia, in Ciudad Satélite, Estado de Mexico, Mexico, August 17, 1963.
145. Alexander, 1994, op. cit., page 24; see also interview with Guillermo Bedregal, onetime manager of Corporación Minera de Bolivia, onetime subchief of MNR in New York City, November 29, 1962.
146. Mitchell, op. cit., page 93.
147. Interview with Manuel Mantilla, an exiled Acción Democrática Party of Venezuela leader, working with Bolivian colonization program, in La Paz, August 21, 1956.
148. Interview with Henry Randall, head of Bolivian Desk of International Cooperation Administration, in Washington, DC, July 5, 1957.
149. Mitchell, op. cit., page 91.
150. *Ibid.*, pages 71–72.
151. Alexander, 1994, op. cit., page 25.
152. Labor Law and Practice in Bolivia, op. cit., page 9.
153. Malloy, op. cit., page 311; see also Mitchell, op. cit., pages 94–95.

154. Alexander, 1994, op. cit., page 24.

155. Lora, 1977, op. cit., page 301.

156. Ibid., page 328.

157. Alexander, 1994, op. cit., page 25.

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## Organized Labor after the Bolivian National Revolution

For the six years following the overthrow of the government of the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario, two generals dominated Bolivian national politics. These were General René Barrientos and General Alfredo Ovando.

René Barrientos had seemed during most of the MNR regime to be a loyal Movimientista. He had been head of the MNR "cell" in the military and had been charged with organizing the air force as a separate branch of the armed forces. However, he had been forced on President Victor Paz Estenssoro as his running mate early in 1964. As vice president, Barrientos became the center of the plotting against Paz Estenssoro.

General Ovando had been named by Paz Estenssoro as commander in chief of the armed forces. Whereas Paz had suspected the loyalty of Vice President Barrientos, he had had implicit faith until November 4, 1964, in that of General Ovando. His betrayal by Ovando, who was at the heart of the conspiracy against him, came as a great shock to the deposed president.<sup>1</sup>

For a short time, the two generals served as "co-presidents," but then Barrientos resigned, leaving Ovando as the single chief executive, to run for president in elections held in 1966. Barrientos was the easy victor and continued in office until early 1969, when he died in a helicopter crash. He was succeeded for a few months by his vice president, Luis Adolfo Siles, half brother of Hernán Siles and head of the small Social Democratic Party. However, after a few months, Siles was overthrown by General Ovando, who had continued to be head of the military.

Ovando's administration remained in office for a year. During that period, he undertook a more "nationalist" and "liberal" pro-

gram than that of Barrientos. He expropriated the holdings of the Gulf Oil Company and allowed the reorganization of the labor movement, which had been decimated between 1964 and 1969.

Discontented generals finally moved against General Ovando, and after some confusion, General Juan Torres, with the support of the Central Obrera Boliviana, succeeded in taking over the presidency. During his short regime, the COB played a major role, particularly in organizing the so-called *Asamblea Popular* (Popular Assembly), as a kind of 1917-style "soviet."

However, in August 1971, another military insurrection, led by Colonel Hugo Banzer, succeeded in overthrowing Torres. The Banzer government, in its first phase, enjoyed the support of the *Frente Popular Nacionalista*, an unlikely alliance of the *Falange Socialista Boliviana* and the faction of the MNR led by Victor Paz Estenssoro.

However, within two years the Banzer regime was transformed into a thoroughgoing personalist military dictatorship, in which all political parties were suppressed. Although the Banzer period saw a considerable expansion of the economy, with particular growth of the so-called small and medium-sized private sector of the mining industry, as well as of commercial agriculture in the East, and some advance in manufacturing, the labor movement suffered severely, particularly after the end of the *Frente Popular Nacionalista*.

President Banzer finally called elections in 1978. Although their results were unclear, the "government candidate," General Juan Pereda, seized power. There then followed a period of widespread political confusion, with further elections in 1979 and 1980 and various coups and countercoups, which brought three generals and two civilians (Walter Guevara Arce and Lidia Gueiler) to the presidency for short periods of time.

Finally, in October 1982, Hernán Siles, who had clearly won the election of 1980, was allowed to take office. During his troubled second presidency, in the process of which the pro-Soviet faction of the Communist Party served in the government alongside Hernán Siles' own MNRI (Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario de la Izquierda—Left MNR), there was a staggering economic crisis. The COB, in a new resurgence of power, thwarted all attempts of President Siles to carry out any program to curb the virtually uncontrolled inflation.

President Siles finally gave up and called new elections a year ahead of time. In those elections, in July 1985, Victor Paz Estenssoro returned to the presidency once again. This time, he came into office with a determination to impose a very vigorous anti-

inflation program and to close down those parts of the Corporación Minera de Bolivia that were losing money.

President Paz's program brought an immediate clash with the COB. In a showdown a few weeks after Paz assumed office, he defeated the COB. Henceforward, for the rest of the Paz Estenssoro administration, the power of the labor movement seemed finally to have been broken. Although in the early 1990s, the COB and its affiliated unions were able to make it clear that they were still a significant element in national political and economic life, by 1990 this new resurgence had not yet become evident. In any case, the power of what had for half a century been the strongest and most militant segment of organized labor, the miners' federation, had been largely destroyed.

### **ORGANIZED LABOR FOLLOWING THE OVERTHROW OF THE MNR**

We have noted that Juan Lechín was one of those who had conspired with the generals to bring about the overthrow of President Victor Paz Estenssoro in November 1964. He had apparently hoped that the new military regime would be friendly toward him, the Central Obrera Boliviana and the labor movement in general, and perhaps (as Guillermo Lora has suggested) thought that the generals might bring about fulfillment of this ambition to become president.

However, Lora makes it clear that Lechín quickly found out that his hopes for the military regime were misplaced. Lora recounted, "Immediately after the coup of 4 November 1964 he tried to enter the Presidential Palace at the head of his followers, but he found the doors bolted and was met with machine-gun fire. This was a symbolic event, which indicated that it had become almost impossible for Lechín to become President of the Republic."<sup>2</sup>

In spite of this rebuff to Juan Lechín, the relationship of the labor movement to the military regime remained somewhat uncertain for some time. A Revolutionary Peoples Committee was organized, which included some labor leaders, as well as figures of the Left parties that had supported the coup against Paz Estenssoro. It met for some time in the congress building and called itself a "popular parliament." However, Guillermo Lora noted, "The moment it attempted to turn its strength against the military regime, it was promptly dissolved."<sup>3</sup>

The new Junta Militar freed Federico Escobar, the Siglo XX miners' leader who had been jailed by the Paz regime.<sup>4</sup> Also, a few days after the coup the second figure in the miners' federation,

Mario Torres, obtained an interview with General Barrientos, the president of the Junta Militar, in which "he requested the enforcement of the *control obrero* with the right of veto, emphasized the need to install a smelter, to put into operation more than 400 mines then paralyzed, and to reemploy mine workers and leaders dismissed by the previous government. He announced that the FSTMB would present a memorandum as soon as possible."<sup>5</sup>

During the last half of November, General Barrientos visited some of the mines. There, the *control obrero* people in San José and Huanuni mines both reiterated the issues presented by Mario Torres.<sup>6</sup> During his visit to the Siglo XX mine, Barrientos "was welcomed by the Communist union leader Daniel Ordoñez whose speech included such statements as 'The Paz Estenssoro regime could never solve our main problems. . . . We pay you our respects, General. . . . It is always being claimed that the mines are centers of extremism and arbitrary conduct. On this visit you have been able to judge for yourself, since we miners treat people for what they are worth.' "<sup>7</sup>

Trifonio Delgado Gonzáles noted the apparent absence of the Central Obrera Boliviana as such during this period. He recorded that Juan Lechín had finally gotten to see the president, but in his capacity as leader of the Partido Revolucionario de la Izquierda Nacionalista, not as head of the COB or the miners' federation. Delgado Gonzáles said, "At this moment the COB appeared to have entered into a definitive recess, because only the confederations and federations pointed out and resolved important problems."<sup>8</sup>

More evidence of the failure of the COB to function effectively as a spokesman for the labor movement in general during this period was the signing on December 8, 1964, of a Pact of Mutual Defense between the miners' federation and the Confederation of Factory Workers. This pact sought "to maintain all of the social-labor conquests achieved until then, to be able to consolidate them and, finally, to prevent their violation."<sup>9</sup>

The pact was signed at the end of a conference of the miners' federation, December 6-8, 1964, held in La Paz. That meeting was divided between supporters of Juan Lechín's new party, the PRIN, and the Stalinists of the Communist Party and the Trotskyists of the POR. Although Juan Lechín did not attend the meeting, he was apparently in constant contact with his fellow PRINistas there. The conference rejected a PRIN motion calling on the military government to call immediate elections, although at the specific request of Lechín it did insist on the need for "honest democratic elections." It also rejected a motion introduced by the POR calling for the arming of the workers. It concluded that the

Paz Estenssoro and Junta Militar regimes were "identical."<sup>10</sup> Finally, it adopted a resolution to the effect that "the mine workers will maintain in the future a strictly trade union line, and will not be influenced by party interests."<sup>11</sup>

One of the early moves of the military regime was to launch "Operation Disarmament" to try to collect the large numbers of arms in the hands of the civilian populace. However, Guillermo Lora noted, "This programme did not . . . operate in the mines."<sup>12</sup>

Relations between the government and the organized workers, particularly those in the mines, became increasingly tense. The Ministry of Labor made clear its opposition to so-called illegal strikes, and its determination not to permit them. In a communiqué it announced, "The strike is a measure resorted to after due process of law, and only an effort to subvert public order will constitute an immediate menace. Thus, there existing the legal procedures provided in the law, the Ministry of Labor will not recognize suspension of activities resorted to as a means of coercion."<sup>13</sup>

The military regime went on with the Triangular Plan and the general effort to "rationalize" the functioning of COMIBOL started by Paz Estenssoro. By 1968 the workforce in COMIBOL had been reduced from 29,000 to 21,000. The basis of wage payments was changed from an hourly wage to an incentive basis. As a consequence of these and other measures, COMIBOL actually made a profit for the first time in 1966.<sup>14</sup>

Clearly, the economic policies of the military regime had sooner or later to lead to a confrontation with organized labor, particularly the miners. The first major showdown between the military government and the labor movement took place in May 1965. Orators at the May Day celebration, including Juan Lechín, strongly attacked the military government. A few days later, minister of government Antonio Arguedas strongly attacked Lechín at a press conference, claiming that he had proof that Lechín "held documents as a Chilean citizen."

The COB responded to this attack by issuing a communiqué that said, "Juan Lechín is the object of a persistent campaign of persecution by the Department of Criminal Investigation (DIC). . . . The COB condemns the repressive policy, which the government has adopted and that is beginning to take effect with the harassment of comrade Lechín. It is evident that the suspension of elections is a step toward military dictatorship."

Then on May 19, 1965, Juan Lechín was exiled to Paraguay. At the time, the government issued a communiqué saying: "The Military Junta will maintain authority inflexibly, within the legal framework that regulated all the government's actions. Trade-



Union Law will be respected, as will all the rights of the working class, but the latter should not allow themselves to be led into irresponsible activities of the type into which this master [Juan Lechín] of adventurism and corruption, who for 30 years has persistently deceived the working masses, has sought to precipitate them."

The COB responded to Lechín's arrest by calling a general strike. It demanded "(1) the immediate return of the Executive Secretary of the COB; (2) a general increase in wages; and (3) the maintenance and enforcement of the legal guarantees that protect trade-union activities."

Meanwhile, the miners in the principal mining areas took over armed control of the mining camps, and "all approaches to the mines were guarded, housewives stocked-up with provisions for the mining battles and agents of the DIC were told to leave Llallagua. Other mining districts immediately copied this example."

The COB proclamation of a general strike praised what the miners had done. It said:

The future of the country and of the revolution is in the hands of the heroic miners who have risen up in arms. They have given us a magnificent example that we should imitate: the general strike has been accompanied by a general mobilization of the worker-peasant militias who, at an opportune moment will become guerrillas fighting for the liberation of our people. The miners will lead us to victory provided they obtain sufficient active support in the cities.

However, the general strike was not successful. Guillermo Lora wrote that "in the cities the strike was relatively weak from the very beginning, revealing the bankruptcy of the COB leadership. In La Paz the factory-workers' radio, Continental, was silenced by mortar fire; in an assault on the building-workers union office one of the union leaders was killed."

Only in the mines was the strike clearly effective. However, army units were sent into the mining camps that were put under military command. In Milluni, the mine was bombarded by the air force, and there was bitter fighting between army troops and workers behind trenches they had constructed. In Siglo XX "the soldiers broke into every house, turning mattresses inside out and rummaging through chests, and searching the roofs looking for arms and dynamite. Hundreds of workers fell in the May onslaught."<sup>15</sup>

The Military Junta took other steps to undermine, if not destroy, the mine unions. On May 23, Colonel Juan Lechín (half brother of the union leader), the head of the COMIBOL, an-

nounced the dismissal of all mine union officers. In announcing this, the decree proclaimed:

During the last 12 years the most alarming and demagogic unruliness has prevailed, with the adoption of an irresponsible wages policy which could and can be financed by the wasteful allocation of vast sums of money. . . . Extremist and anarchist leaders, prompted by financial incentives from the government, have incited the miners to violate continually the basic norms of respect and worker discipline, on occasion giving rise to armed uprisings commanded by local bosses who had converted various mining zones into their own fiefs, making rational technical and administrative management impossible and in turn leading to disorderly and uneconomic exploitation of the mineral deposits.<sup>16</sup>

Jorge Gallardo Lozada described the vendetta of the Barrientos government against organized labor after the May 1965 events. He wrote that "the trade union activity was impeded with the closing of the headquarters of the workers and the apprehension and exile of the majority of them; the COB, the Miners Federation and other organizations were assaulted and occupied; in most cases they passed into the hands of the military, as in the case of 'Batallón Colorado' radio, which until then was the property of the workers of Milluni; in all, total depredation."<sup>17</sup>

COMIBOL also decreed drastic wage cuts, amounting in some cases to as much as 40 percent.<sup>18</sup>

The removal of the elected miners' leaders was only partially effective. Most of them moved to villages near the mining areas, from which they kept in existence a clandestine union movement. Some of these leaders succeeded in visiting the mines from time to time and even holding surreptitious meetings there before retreating again to anonymity. A conference was held in Oruro, and a clandestine meeting of the miners' federation was held at the University of La Paz. That meeting drew up a program that, according to Guillermo Lora, "can be reduced to two basic points which guided the workers' actions at every moment: the restoration of wages to their May 1965 level and the withdrawal of troops from the mines."<sup>19</sup>

In 1966, General Barrientos was elected "constitutional president." However, the vendetta of the regime against the urban and mine unions did not cease. In February 1967, Barrientos dismissed his labor minister, Vicente Mendoza, a Christian Democrat who, according to Guillermo Lora, "had promised a favorable solution to the demands put forward by the legal unions six months earlier. The workers of Siglo XX-Catavi interpreted this move to mean that Barrientos and company were resolved to use violence

once again in response to the workers' demand for the restoration of their wages."<sup>20</sup>

A new crisis quickly developed, leading to a new massacre in the mines, known as "the night of San Juan." On June 6, there was a national miners' union meeting in Huanuni, which went on record demanding restoration of wages to the May 1965 level and reinstatement of all dismissed mine union leaders. It also resolved to aid Che Guevara's guerrillas, who were then active in the eastern part of the country, with food and medicine and to hold a public meeting of the miners' federation in Siglo XX-Catavi on June 24 and a "demonstration of popular unity" in Oruro on June 8. The government responded by declaring a state of siege in the mining areas. It also proceeded to tear up some railway track near Oruro, thus preventing the demonstration on June 8. However, the union leaders went on with their plans for a congress of the miners' federation at Siglo XX-Catavi on July 24.

July 23 was the religious feast of San Juan, a traditional celebration accompanied by dancing, drinking, and other merriment. As Guillermo Lora said, as a result of this, "For most people in the district, political and trade union problems became matters of secondary importance."

However, the military took advantage of this situation to carry out a violent attack on Siglo XX-Catavi. Earlier in the day, an agreement had been reached among the unions in the area and five political parties—the POR, the pro-Soviet and pro-Chinese Communist parties, the PRIN, and the MNR—to establish a guard over the headquarters of the Siglo XX union. Hence, when troops moved in early on the morning of June 24, the member of the pro-Soviet Communist Party whose turn it was to be on guard was immediately killed by the soldiers.

The army's attack on Siglo XX was such a surprise that the workers had little chance to organize any effective armed resistance. However, twenty people were killed, and over seventy were wounded by the soldiers. The Siglo XX mine and surrounding areas were officially declared a military zone, "a situation which outlived General Barrientos himself," according to Guillermo Lora.<sup>21</sup>

There were various reactions on the part of the miners and other workers to the "night of San Juan." The union at the Huanuni mine held a meeting within the mine itself, which among other things sent an appeal to the archbishop of La Paz to intervene with the government to present demands for removal of troops from the mines, return of the Siglo XX mine union offices to the workers, release of all prisoners, and several other things.

Juan Lechín, who was in Chile at the time, issued a statement in which he declared: "The generals are resolved to defend their privileges through violence, rather than by pacific means. To liberate the people from the most bloody tyranny, I repeat that there is no other way than that of armed struggle, solidly united and duly prepared and organized, as the guerrillas are."<sup>22</sup>

A general strike was declared in protest against the events of the "night of San Juan." It lasted sixteen days, but the strike committee finally decided to negotiate with the government. According to Lora, the committee "accepted an extremely humiliating agreement to end the conflict. They accepted all the conditions imposed by the Barrientos-Ovando regime."<sup>23</sup>

In the face of the total intransigence of the Barrientos government and its willingness to use armed force, the organized labor movement in the cities and mining areas was decimated and for the time reduced almost to impotence. Even efforts in Cochabamba and a few other cities to establish Christian trade unions were suppressed by the Barrientos government, because these unions were not willing to become subservient to the regime.<sup>24</sup>

## **BARRIENTOS AND THE PEASANT MOVEMENT**

The approach of President Barrientos toward the country's rural unions and toward the peasantry in general was markedly different from his handling of the urban labor movement. Barrientos, a native of Cochabamba region, where he had grown up knowing the Quechua language of the Indian peasants of that area, sought to mobilize the peasantry in support of his regime. He spent much of his time visiting rural unions and agrarian reform centers, where he frequently gave impassioned speeches in Quechua to those gathered to listen to him and inaugurated local projects benefiting particular groups of peasants.

The Barrientos government continued the agrarian reform process. In 1968, a survey made by the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) estimated that 40 percent of the Indians had been given land titles. The Barrientos administration simplified the procedure for granting titles, establishing several mobile teams to go out into particular areas to make land grants, reportedly making it possible to carry out the process in a particular region in a matter of weeks instead of years. The new procedures cut down the time necessary to grant a valid title, even if the old landlords litigated the matter, from ten years to two.<sup>25</sup>

Barrientos also supported efforts to bring the peasants more fully into the market. He supported programs of the AID to en-

courage the peasants to shear not only their sheep but also their llamas and vicunas and sell the wool and even tentative efforts to get the peasants to slaughter some of their sheep principally as evidence of wealth and prestige.<sup>26</sup>

Barrientos was, to a large degree, successful in his efforts to woo peasant support. Guillermo Lora, certainly no admirer of Barrientos, admitted: "His was the only military regime ever to enjoy real peasant support, not merely from the *caciques*, but also from vast sectors of the peasantry itself. For the peasants saw his regime as a guarantee of their ownership of the land, which they felt to be threatened by Falangist efforts to undo the land reform begun in 1952."<sup>27</sup>

In 1966, Barrientos and peasant leaders signed what was called "the Military Peasant Pact." It proclaimed, "The Armed Forces will make sure that the conquests achieved by the majority classes are respected, such as the Agrarian Reform, basic education, union rights and others. . . . The peasants will support and defend, firmly and loyally, the military institution in all circumstances. They will put themselves under military orders, against the subversive maneuvers of the left."<sup>28</sup>

Peasant organizations frequently expressed this support of Barrientos. Trifonio Delgado Gonzáles cited a resolution of the Departmental Peasant Federation of Cochabamba at the time of the "night of San Juan" that said, "The insurrectional outbreaks of the mining districts are the product of the work of agitation and perturbation undertaken by the agents of international communism. So what we want to reiterate to his Excellency the President of the Republic, General don René Barrientos Ortuño, to his constitutional government and to the Armed Forces of the Nation, is our complete moral and material support in this difficult moment, so that his noble task of carrying forward the revolutionary process can continue."

Delgado Gonzáles concluded, "Thus was consummated the definitive and total scission between the mining class and the Bolivian peasantry."<sup>29</sup>

## ORGANIZED LABOR DURING THE OVANDO REGIME

After four months in office, Luis Adolfo Siles, who had succeeded to the presidency on the death of General Barrientos, was overthrown in September 1969 by a coup led by General Alfredo Ovando. President Ovando launched a quite different regime from that of Barrientos. He claimed to come to power in the name of the armed forces, expressed through an "armed forces mandate."

He brought into his government at first a group of young independent and more or less left-wing civilian politicians.

Expressing the "nationalism" of his regime, Ovando canceled the petroleum code originally passed in the first administration of Victor Paz Estenssoro and nationalized the Gulf Oil Company's holdings. He also repealed the Law of State Security, passed during the Barrientos period.

Ovando made overtures toward the organized labor movement. He met the principal immediate demands of the labor movement, withdrawing troops from the mining region, promising to restore wage levels in the mines to those of 1965 (but not fulfilling this promise), and generally allowing the unions, including the Central Obrera Boliviana, to reorganize. Juan Lechín returned from exile to lead in this reorganization process.

By the early months of 1970, most of them held new congresses. These include the miners' federation, which held its Fourteenth Congress in April 1970. Although Juan Lechín was reelected executive secretary of the FSTMB, the congress adopted a "political thesis" largely written by the Trotskyists of Guillermo Lora's Partido Obrero Revolucionario, which revised the Pulacayo Thesis by adding a condemnation of "state capitalism," that is, of the operation of COMIBOL.

On May 1, 1970, the Fourth Congress of the Central Obrera Boliviana was opened with the first May Day celebration in several years. It adopted a modified version of the "political thesis" passed by the miners, and although some changes were made in it, Guillermo Lora, who was a delegate to the COB meeting representing a "union of artists and writers," announced to the meeting that the POR was willing to vote for the document. Juan Lechín was reelected executive secretary of the COB.

One seriously disturbing event of the COB's Fourth Congress was the withdrawal from it of the representatives of the peasants' confederation, the Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores Campesinos (CNTC). The alleged reason for the withdrawal was that the credentials committee of the congress had seated only 28 of the peasants' 138 delegates. More important, perhaps, was the fact that the CNTC had hastened, upon the assumption of power by Ovando, to renew the Military-Peasant Pact, thus supporting the new president. Most of the urban organized labor movement was not that enthusiastic about the Ovando regime, in view of Ovando's role in the treatment of the labor movement since 1965, although they were willing to give qualified backing to him, in the hope that they could get him to broaden still further the room for the labor movement to act freely.<sup>30</sup>

## ORGANIZED LABOR AND THE TORRES REGIME

President Ovando remained in office a little more than a year. On October 5, 1970, a group of right-wing generals headed by the commander of the army, General Rogelio Miranda, rose in revolt against him. There followed considerable confusion. First, General Miranda proclaimed that he had taken the presidency; then it was announced that there would be a Junta Militar composed of three ranking officers. At one point, General Ovando came out of the embassy in which he had taken refuge and sought to get some of the military leaders who had just overthrown him to restore him to office.

Meanwhile, General Juan José Torres, who, after serving in the Barrientos regime had been President Ovando's first military commander in chief but had been forced to resign because of expressing too ardent a support for "the Revolution," announced his opposition to the rightist coup and proclaimed himself president. The Central Obrera Boliviana, with strong support from the university students, declared a general strike and organized demonstrations against the "Mirandistas."

General Torres went from La Paz to the air force base in El Alto, on the plateau above La Paz, where the air force had declared its opposition to the Mirandistas, and threatened to bomb rebellious troops in the city. A delegation from the COB, headed by Juan Lechín, visited General Torres at El Alto and declared their qualified support for him, given the situation at the time. Torres also got support from most of the garrisons of the interior and from some of the La Paz army garrison. The Junta Militar finally resigned.

There never was a showdown between the Mirandistas and the troops supporting Torres. Rather, the military supporting Torres and those originally supporting General Miranda were once again merged, with most of the officers who had originally supported Miranda not being removed from their command posts. This merger was to create many headaches for President Torres and was ultimately to bring his overthrow ten months later.<sup>31</sup>

Relations between the Torres government and the leaders of the organized labor movement during Torres' ten months in office might best be called equivocal. The Torres regime admittedly was a heterogeneous one. It included a minority of military officers who were declared advocates of "socialism" and "the revolution" and others who were more opportunistic than principled and ultimately betrayed Torres. The civilians in the regime were equally divided. They included Jorge Gallardo Lozada, minister of interior during all ten months, a self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist but un-

affiliated with, and quite critical of, the various Stalinist and Trotskyist parties that seemed to dominate the labor movement during the Torres period. Other civilians were less clearly advocates of "socialism" and "the revolution."

From the moment that Juan Lechín led a union delegation to El Alto to declare the labor movement's qualified support for General Torres, the new president sought to get the union leaders to take part in his government. He first offered them four posts in his cabinet and then increased the number to eight, that is, half of the government positions. After extensive discussion among themselves, the labor leaders turned down this offer, apparently being unwilling to share responsibility in a regime that they would almost certainly not control and that at least some of the labor leaders saw as an impediment, to be pushed aside to permit "the workers" finally to seize power.<sup>32</sup>

However, the Torres government took a number of steps favored by the union leaders. It finally restored the wage levels of the miners to those prevailing in 1965. The miners of Siglo XX-Catavi showed their appreciation of this in a visit to President Torres to the area, where he got an enthusiastic reception.<sup>33</sup>

The Torres government also took certain "anti-imperialist" measures favored by the labor leadership. It canceled an agreement with a U.S. company that had allowed it to try to exploit the waste of some of the mines, which by then contained more metal than was obtained from digging underground. It canceled the grant of the Matilde zinc mine to another U.S. company. It sought financial, technical, and even military aid from the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe and the USSR.<sup>34</sup>

However, the labor leaders remained suspicious of the Torres government and continued to resist all efforts of President Torres and minister of interior Gallardo Lozada to get them to participate in the regime. Although when faced with an attempted coup in January 1951 by Colonel Hugo Banzer, head of the military academy, the unions rallied in defense of the regime, as they did during Banzer's second revolt in August 1971, when workers' militia participated (under Juan Lechín's leadership) in the effort to put down the military revolt in La Paz, they refused to be part of the Torres regime.

Certainly, in those months Guillermo Lora, head of the largest of the three Trotskyist factions then existing in Bolivia, played a major role in the councils of the trade union leadership. Later, ex-minister Jorge Gallardo Lozada held him to a large degree responsible for the failure of organized labor to cooperate fully with the regime. Gallardo Lozada wrote, "These speculators—Guillermo Lora among others—in national politics did not have a correct vi-



sion or really appreciate that in defeating Torres they were defeating themselves."

Gallardo Lozada also quoted a speech Lora had given at Catholic University in which Lora had said that "it is necessary to overthrow the government of General Torres because it is the last obstacle that opposes the rise of the working class to total power in the republic." He added that "Lora not only predicted the fall of the revolutionary government, but contributed with all of his actions in bringing that about."<sup>35</sup>

## THE COMANDO POLÍTICO AND ASAMBLEA POPULAR

With the overthrow of Ovando and General Torres' subsequent proclamation of his own presidency, the leaders of the Central Obrera Boliviana established what they called the Political Command (Comando Político). According to Guillermo Lora, "It was created by trade union and civic organizations and left-wing political parties, which gathered to oppose the right-wing group. It declared that its intention was to give political leadership to the masses at the moment of difficulty." It was the Comando Político that called the general strike against the Mirandistas.

Again according to Lora, it was within the Comando Político that there occurred the debate over whether or not to join the Torres government. Generally, "the nationalists and Stalinists" supported doing so, and "the rest of the Marxist left" opposed the idea.<sup>36</sup> As we have noted, the latter group won out.

The Comando Político issued a proclamation that it called "Mandate of the Popular Forces," consisting of twenty objectives or demands. The first was "[r]ecognition of the political leadership of the working class, the university, the political parties, and the people, as the Popular Workers Parliament." Among the other things demanded were deportation of "the military and civilian fascist groups" as well as "imperialist agencies," amnesty for all political prisoners, return to previous miners' wage levels, seizure of the Matilde mine, return of *control obrero* with right of veto, "establishment of workers and popular militia to support, together with the patriotic Armed Forces, the rights and interests of the Nation, profundization of the Agrarian Reform through strengthening the sector of communities and cooperatives."<sup>37</sup>

With the stabilization of the Torres regime after Colonel Banzer's first, unsuccessful coup in January 1971, in the suppression of which the Comando Político had played a significant part,<sup>38</sup> the objectives of the labor leaders changed. As Guillermo Lora later put it, "In October 1970 it was overoptimistic to hope that the Comando could become a form of popular par-

liament, but after January 1951, it was natural that it should turn itself into a centre of power, preparing for the creation of a worker-peasant government."<sup>39</sup>

The next three months were spent in preparing for establishment of what was called the *Asamblea Popular* (Popular Assembly). It consisted of delegates from union groups, peasant organizations, students' groups, and political parties. It was reminiscent of the Russian soviets between the February and October revolutions of 1917. Of the 218 members the Popular Assembly was supposed to have, it was decided that 60 percent would be representatives of trade unions, 25 percent would be from middle-class organizations, 10 percent would be peasants, and 5 percent were to be representatives of parties.<sup>40</sup>

Of course, the various political parties involved played a major role in naming *Asamblea* delegates supposedly representing unions and other nonparty organizations. The party alignment that resulted was surprising, given the "socialist" rhetoric that was then relevant. According to Victor Paz Estenssoro at the time, the *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* had the largest single bloc of delegates, followed by the pro-Soviet Communist Party. Also represented were the PRIN of Juan Lechín, pro-Chinese Communists, the *Partido Socialista*, the *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* (a split-off from the Christian Democrats), the Revolutionary Christian Democrats, and the Trotskyist POR of Guillermo Lora.<sup>41</sup>

Paz Estenssoro's analysis was largely borne out by Jorge Gallardo Lozada, President Torres' minister of interior. He conceded that the *Comando Obrero* of the MNR had the largest number of delegates in the *Asamblea Popular*, sixty-five. The pro-Moscow Communists, according to him, had twenty, the PRIN also twenty, the MIR eight, the *Partido Socialista* also eight, the POR of Lora six, the pro-Chinese Communist seven. There were thirty delegates whom Gallardo Lozada classified as "independent."<sup>42</sup>

A few days before the formal opening of the *Asamblea Popular*, the *Comando Político* issued a statement concerning the nature and objectives of the new body. It stated that "the *Asamblea Popular* will not limit itself to criticizing governmental acts or drawing up suggestions, but in reality, will solve problems and carry out its decisions."

The statement declared: "The Popular Assembly is a revolutionary anti-imperialist front directed by the proletariat. It is made up of the COB, the trade union confederations, federations of a national character, popular organizations and political parties of revolutionary orientation." Declaring its program to be the Political Thesis adopted by the Fourth Congress of the COB in

1970, it declared, "Any attitude contrary to that thesis or of the declaration, which served as the basis for constituting the Asamblea Popular in February 1971, is incompatible with participation in this organization."

Finally, this statement declared, "The Asamblea Popular constitutes itself the leadership and unifying center of the anti-imperialist movement, and its fundamental objective is to achieve national liberation and the establishment of Socialism in Bolivia."<sup>43</sup>

President Torres was clearly not happy about the establishment of the Asamblea Popular. He issued a statement in which he said, "There can be no power relationship between the government and the Asamblea Popular, because its establishment is not provided for in the Constitution. . . . The Asamblea cannot control the acts of the government because it has no constitutional attributes." However, he promised, "I shall listen to all observations the Asamblea may make. . . . I recognize its power of criticism, as I do that of all citizens."<sup>44</sup>

As it turned out, the president need not have worried about the Asamblea's attempting to co-opt the power of the government. Its first meeting—in the congress building, which it occupied without the president's permission—on May 1, 1971, following a May Day march of 50,000 people through the streets of La Paz, was presided over by Juan Lechín. However, its only accomplishment was to vote to hold its first regular session on June 22, when it would elect its Executive, discuss the cooperativization of the conservative daily *El Diario*, as well as the "debureaucratization" of the state mining, petroleum, railroad organizations, and the Development Corporation, and "integration of all mining in a single institution and clarification of the assassinations of workers' leaders and various other matters."<sup>45</sup>

The first plenary session of the Asamblea did meet on June 24, 1971, in the congress building, with large portraits of Lenin and Che Guevara behind the dais.<sup>46</sup> It succeeded in electing a presidium under the leadership of Juan Lechín. However, as Delgado Gonzáles noted, "At a certain moment the Popular Assembly—as a result of violent and bitter discussion—practically disbanded and the presiding officer, René Figueras, had no other choice than to suspend the plenary meeting for lack of quorum."<sup>47</sup>

There is no doubt that some of the leaders of the Asamblea Popular saw it as an instrument for replacing President Torres with a "genuine" revolutionary regime. Among those who had that point of view were Juan Lechín and Guillermo Lora.

At one point, Juan Lechín approached one of the MNR underground leaders who was at the moment in Lima, Peru. He

suggested that this Movimientista return to Bolivia, where Lechín assured him that he could operate freely in the open, and urged that the MNR cooperate with him. He suggested that he would soon be president of Bolivia via the Asamblea Popular, which he compared to the soviets of 1917 Russia. The Movimientistas rejected these overtures.

On another occasion, Guillermo Lora visited this same MNR underground leader in La Paz. He criticized the "ineptness" of President Torres and urged that the MNR join with the POR in preparing a movement to supplant the Torres government with one more truly revolutionary. This contact, like that with Lechín, bore no fruit.<sup>48</sup>

In spite of the exalted objectives that the planners of the Asamblea Popular had for that organization, Guillermo Lora, perhaps the most passionate advocate of the assembly, in commenting on the process of choosing delegates to the body, noted that "once the basic documents had been approved in Comando and various preparations had been completed, it became apparent that the workers were responding very poorly and showing a tremendous negligence in the appointment of delegates. Perhaps they had become overconfident and had concluded that everything would work out well whether or not they took part in the day-to-day organization."<sup>49</sup>

Another Bolivian working-class observer of—although apparently not a participant in—the Asamblea Popular confirmed Lora's indication of the lack of widespread labor enthusiasm for the Asamblea. He wrote, "The truth is that the Asamblea Popular installed in La Paz and some cities of the interior of the nation, from its inauguration until its brusque dissolution—as a consequence of the Coup of August 21, 1971—functioned with a desperate lack of quorum. It gave the impression that attending delegates neither knew nor understood the details of its specific mission."<sup>50</sup>

Delgado Gonzáles concluded that the experience of the labor movement during the Torres period had been disastrous. He said, "The unions, labor federations and confederations, profoundly divided, had disappeared and perished because—without the majority consequences of the rank-and-file and only by decision of their leaders—they were absorbed by the 'Comando Político,' which believed that the moment had come to implant socialism in Bolivia."<sup>51</sup>

## **OVERTHROW OF TORRES AND LABOR IN THE FIRST PHASE OF BANZER REGIME**

The Torres government was a very weak regime. With many of those in the labor movement, to which it looked for support, more interested in supplanting it than backing it, with virtually all of the entrepreneurial classes against it, and with much of the armed forces leadership sullenly and then overtly opposed to it, the regime proved unable to carry out the fundamental task of any government, that is, to maintain law and order.

Jorge Gallardo Lozada, perhaps the most passionate apologist for the Torres administration, presented a graphic portrayal of what was happening. He noted

the climate of anarchy in which certain sectors and districts of the country lived, as a consequence of the violent occupation of rural and urban properties, and also the permanent agitation of the Departmental Committees of Defense of their own local interests. The majority of the occupations were led by some "Pekinese" and Revolutionary Christian Democratic university leaders—whose tactical alliance had given them control of practically all the universities of the country—and some new Trotskyists of the group of Guillermo Lora, backed by labor leaders of the same political affiliation, and here and there a member of the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* [the group growing out of Che Guevara's guerrilla efforts]. These "arbitrary" seizures of public and private properties contributed indirectly to increasing discontent.

Gallardo Lozada cited numerous cases of the kinds of things that were seized: private farms and government buildings in Santa Cruz, private buildings and the headquarters of the second division of the army in Oruro, the Catholic Normal School as well as small farms and private mines in Cochabamba, and the government railroad headquarters of Uyuni, where students and some workers blocked all shipment of minerals.<sup>52</sup>

Victor Paz Estenssoro cited at the time the case of a group of Jewish businessmen of the *Comité Israelita* in La Paz who sought an interview with the minister of interior to ask for guarantees that they and their property would be protected by the government. They were received by the vice minister, whose advice to them was that they gather a fund to pay a ransom should one of their number be kidnapped.<sup>53</sup>

The weakness of the government was confirmed on August 20–21, 1971, when a military insurrection, starting in the eastern Department of Santa Cruz, spread rapidly throughout the country. The only severe fighting took place in La Paz, where some loyal troops and police and hundreds of badly armed workers and students fought for a number of hours. But when the air force,

which had been Torres' most assured military support, finally decided to back the uprising, the resistance to the coup collapsed.<sup>54</sup>

The new president who emerged from the August 1971 revolt was Colonel Hugo Banzer. Although he had been captured by the Torres government just before the uprising began, he had been its organizer and was its undisputed leader and hence the new president.

The unusual and unlikely aspect of this military seizure of power was that it had the support of both those elements of the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario led by Victor Paz Estenssoro and of the Falange Socialista Boliviana, which for a generation had been the mortal enemy of the MNR. Together they formed the so-called Nationalist Popular Front (Frente Popular Nacionalista). With the coming to power of Banzer, both of these parties entered the cabinet, although Paz Estenssoro, who returned from his exile in Lima, was not part of the government.

As a result of the victory of the Banzer forces, "Bolivian trade unionism was crushed and disorganized," as Trifonio Delgado Gonzáles observed. Those unionists who played leading roles in the Comando Político and the Asamblea Popular "disappeared from the scene, some hidden and dispersed, living anonymously, others took the road to voluntary exile, among them Lechín Oquendo, Lora, and others. Among the working class there was total demoralization because every attempt at reorganization and mild agitation was suppressed in the name of the law and the established order."<sup>55</sup>

There were widespread arrests of political and trade union supporters of the Torres regime. Eleven months after the triumph of the Banzer forces, the *Miami Herald* reported that there were still "between 500 and 1,000 suspected subversives in concentration camps in La Paz, Achoalla, Viecha and Coatin Island in lake Titicaca." At about the same time, Victor Paz Estenssoro admitted that these included eighty-nine members of the MNR who had been associated with the Asamblea Popular and that in July 1972, fourteen of these were still in prison.<sup>56</sup>

However, some degree of recovery soon occurred in the labor movement. At the San José mine in Oruro, where a new union secretary-general took over, a general assembly was soon held, which adopted a resolution that was sent to the new authorities of the Department of Oruro, which demanded, among other things, stability of workers in their jobs and "respect for their economic-social conquests," freedom of the unions to function, liberation of jailed union and university leaders, and an end of military intervention in the unions. The departmental military authorities replied that "there are full guarantees for the workers,

that there is no intention of depriving them of their sources of work or to carry out persecutions," but added that these guarantees "will not be extended to politicians and extremist leaders who have sowed anarchy and chaos in the country and constantly were urging the citizenry to bloody confrontations and trying to divide the population with their demagogic preaching and cultivation of hatred."<sup>57</sup>

Various other union groups in different parts of the country also demanded freedom for the labor movement to operate. These included a few of the leaders of the Central Obrera Boliviana who remained in La Paz and submitted such a demand to the new minister of labor, Ciro Humboldt, a member of the MNR. Humboldt replied that "the new regime will guarantee the exercise of unionism in the country and respect for trade union rights."<sup>58</sup>

In some key union groups there was a change in leadership. One of these was the Factory Workers Federation of La Paz, which in a department-wide meeting of union officials repudiated the "antidemocratic" decisions of the COB congress of July 1970 and elected a new leadership.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, a meeting of local and departmental leaders of the Railroad Workers Confederation, under the leadership of Juan Sanjinés, who returned from exile, where he had been during the Torres regime, noted that "some leaders of the Executive Committee" had abandoned their positions and elected a new provisional National Executive Committee for their confederation.<sup>60</sup>

A number of mine workers' unions were reorganized and began to function more or less normally. However, the Banzer government refused to agree to their demands that the miners' federation be allowed to hold a new congress.<sup>61</sup> Guillermo Bedregal, "subchief" of the MNR, spent a month and a half in the mining camps trying to reorganize the party among the miners.<sup>62</sup>

Some union groups hastened to indicate their support of the Banzer regime. Most notable was the case of the Peasants Confederation, which made a complete about-face. Whereas, with the outbreak of the military movement of August 1971, the Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores Campesinos had called for "[m]assive mobilization of the peasantry to put down definitively the fascist and international counterrevolution," it subsequently completely changed its position.

On September 8, the Peasants Confederation issued a resolution saying: "In the country there has been opened a broad democratic way thanks to the decision taken by the Armed Forces of the Nation, saving the people from the voracity of red anarchism and destructive demagoguery. The present moment through which the country is passing requires that the truly patriotic Bo-

livians dedicate themselves to the reconstruction of the Fatherland that has been ravaged by foreign and antipatriotic forces."

This statement went on to say that the confederation "gives unconditional support to the Nationalist and Popular Government headed by Colonel Hugo Banzer Suárez, declaring that it agrees with its postulates, constituting itself an active part of the present historical process." It also declared that the confederation "maintains and reaffirms its position with respect to the Military-Peasant Pact, as a means of struggle for overcoming the present backwardness of Bolivian agriculture."<sup>63</sup>

Elections were held in many unions in the months following the August 1971 coup. According to Victor Paz Estenssoro in July 1972, joint slates of the pro-Russian and pro-Chinese Communists won in the Siglo XX and Catavi mining unions. On the other hand, he claimed that the MNR had gained control of the Industrial Workers Confederation, the Bank Workers Confederation, and several other confederations that had been reorganized.<sup>64</sup>

Although the MNR thus had considerable influence in the labor movement at the beginning of the Banzer regime, this influence declined considerably, particularly after the devaluation of the Bolivian currency late in 1972, which provoked a general wave of price increases. A number of the MNR unionists, particularly in the mines, were reported to have left that party and joined Juan Lechín's party, the PRIN, or the pro-Moscow Communists.<sup>65</sup>

While permitting some carefully watched reorganization of the urban labor movement, the Banzer government tried to hold the peasant movement under closer control. It forbade officials of any of the political parties to carry on organization work among the peasants, perhaps because Banzer feared that Victor Paz Estenssoro and the MNR, which were responsible for the agrarian reform, would still be able to garner widespread support among them.<sup>66</sup> For his part, Banzer was interested in refurbishing the "military-peasant alliance" that Barrientos had originally established and that, to a lesser degree, Ovando had been able to maintain.<sup>67</sup>

The Peasants Confederation held a secret congress in Cochabamba. Among other things, it elected a new slate of officers of the confederation. According to Guillermo Bedregal, who was at the time subchief of the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario, all those elected, except the confederation's secretary-general, were MNR members.<sup>68</sup>

Banzer soon had serious problems with the peasantry. These finally led to an armed showdown between the army and peasants in the Cochabamba region who were blockading roads in protest against the Banzer government's economic policies. The govern-



ment admitted that 100 peasants were killed in this clash, although some estimates of the peasant deaths were as high as 600.<sup>69</sup>

During this period, the Central Obrera Boliviana was not reorganized. Some people were urging that the eleven MNR members and two Falangista members of the COB Executive Committee should "reorganize" it, but it was decided to wait until a new COB congress could meet, which would be after all local unions and the federations and confederations had elected new officials.<sup>70</sup> As it turned out, no such congress was held during the Banzer period.

Trifonio Delgado Gonzáles' judgment of the labor movement in the years immediately following the events of August 20-21, 1971, was that "there did not remain any confederation, federation . . . with sufficient vigor to confront the vicissitudes of the struggle. The evidence of life and ability to respond to the situation were reduced to spontaneous strikes or 'stoppages' in which demands were repeated with monotonous insistence: respect for trade union rights, freedom of leaders and workers detained or exiled, reestablishment of the COB etc."<sup>71</sup>

Early in November 1972, the Banzer government decreed a 60 percent devaluation of the Bolivian currency, from twelve bolívianos to the dollar to twenty. This move, which presaged a major increase in prices of imported goods, gave rise to protests on the part of sections of organized labor. The Confederation of Industrial Workers claimed that "it will sink the working class deeper in misery."

The measure sparked strikes and riots in La Paz. As described by United Press International:

Any troops advancing behind armored cars last week ripped down street barricades in Bolivia's capital and dispersed striking workers who had built them to protest Bolivia's 65 percent devaluation of its currency. Many workers in the capital, responding to the devaluation, threw up barricades of bricks, stones and scrap iron in La Paz's principal streets and some outlying roads. Their action disrupted business activity in the center of the city, where many shops failed to open.<sup>72</sup>

These demonstrations were one of the last outbursts of labor militancy during the early part of the Banzer regime. However, in September 1973 there was a strike of bank workers, which the minister of interior denounced as part of a plot by the far Left to destabilize the regime, and he threatened to replace all of the strikers with retired workers and members of the sizable force of unemployed.<sup>73</sup>

When, in October 1973, the government issued a decree freezing all wages and salaries but permitting unions to negotiate with their employers increases of up to 120 bolivianos per month, "[t]he trade union reply to this new measure that influenced the level of living of the workers was isolated, inoperative and null," according to Trifonio Delgado Gonzáles.<sup>74</sup>

## **THE PERIOD OF GOVERNMENT-IMPOSED TRADE UNION LEADERSHIP**

The situation of organized labor became much worse with the breaking up of the Frente Popular Nacionalista. At the end of 1973, the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario officially withdrew from the Banzer government, and in January 1974 Victor Paz Estenssoro was deported. Although the Falange members of the cabinet remained in office some time longer, as did some cabinet members who had originally been named by the MNR, in November 1974, President Banzer dispensed totally with the parties and civilians in general, forming an all-military government.

The hostility of the new all-military cabinet toward the country's existing trade union leadership was clearly spelled out in a document on the reorganization of the Ministry of Labor published in December 1974. It proclaimed:

One must consider that, for reasons of fact and law that have occurred in the past and the motivations, which will be judged by history, this powerful instrument consecrated in the Constitution and in labor law has been distorted by pernicious partisan influences to ends not always the same as the high aims of a healthy defense of labor groups. This negative conduct not only weakens the unionized groups but also distorts the mentality and class sense of the growing Bolivian proletariat and orients it toward use by political elements of the middle class.

This statement went on:

On the other hand, the defense of the privileges of certain minorities of the elite, which gravitate tirelessly around the trade union leadership for ten, twenty or thirty years, gives rise to a kind of professional patronage that has not permitted the renovation of leadership. Thus, trade union freedom had been systematically abused, not always by employer action or repression of the authorities involved in public order, but also and principally by the activity of the trade union leaders themselves who have made bad use of their representation of their rank and file, in spite of having occupied alternatively high positions in the State.<sup>75</sup>

Soon after the publication of that document, the regime announced a totally new approach to organized labor. The new all-

military cabinet issued two decree laws that were designed to completely destroy the autonomy of the labor movement, as well as that of most other civilian organizations. Decree Law 11,497 declared vacant all officials' posts not only in trade unions but also in businessmen's organizations, mutual benefit societies, and university and student groups. It established "Obligatory Civil Service" for everyone over the age of twenty-one—which meant that any civilian had to accept any leadership position in such organizations as the government might indicate.

This measure was undoubtedly aimed particularly at labor organizations. Among other things, the decree provided that it applied to "federations, confederations and others, with strikes, stoppages, lockouts and all forms of suspension and paralyzation of activities of labor and production."

The second of these measures, Supreme Decree 11,952, established the positions of "Labor Coordinators" on all levels of the labor movement. People named by the government to these positions were "to administer or delegate the control of the social property of labor organizations, with intervention of the labor authorities. To [sic] effectuate and carry out any measures designed to resolve the needs of the workers in their work centers."<sup>76</sup>

The new minister of labor in the all-military cabinet, Colonel Mario Vargas Salinas, explained the government's rationale for substituting appointed leaders to replace those elected by the union members. He argued that labor leadership had always been "too political," and it was necessary to develop a new, younger leadership that would not belong to any party. For this to be achieved, it would be necessary to have a period of four or five years during which such a new leadership could be developed and trained.<sup>77</sup>

The subsecretary of labor, a civilian, echoed the minister's ideas. He argued that there existed on the local level natural leaders who were not particularly political and that the government's job would be, when the time came, to encourage the election of these people, first on a local level and then on higher echelons of their unions, without being too obvious about its doing so.<sup>78</sup>

The minister of labor apparently thought that through the trade union education courses run by the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), the kind of new leadership that he professed to seek might be developed. However, when he proposed that he be the one to select who should study in the courses organized by the AIFLD, this suggestion was rejected by AIFLD. Apparently, under the circumstances, he decided that he would leave the selection of union students as well as of the material to be taught—which had considerable emphasis on

collective bargaining and negotiation of collective agreements—up to AIFLD and take his chances.<sup>79</sup>

As a matter of fact, most of those named by the government as “labor coordinators” were people who had held elective posts before Decree 11,952 went into effect.<sup>80</sup> Trifonio Delgado Gonzáles claimed, “The great majority of leaders among the factory workers, artisans . . . alleging prestige, seniority, moral solvency and capacity, approached the labor authorities offering to carry out the functions of Labor Coordinators.”<sup>81</sup>

Undoubtedly, various motives impelled elected leaders to accept these posts. One important one, which was cited to me by “coordinators” with whom I spoke in July 1975, was that, according to the Decree Law, anyone who refused to take a job as labor coordinator could be jailed for two years.<sup>82</sup>

Certainly, most of the “coordinators” with whom I talked felt that they were being discredited with their rank and file by serving as government-appointed union officials. However, a few did not, such as one of the coordinators in the Confederation of Petroleum Workers, who had been an elected local union official. He noted that his union had been less politicized than most and that in meetings with rank-and-file groups of oil workers he had the feeling that they still had confidence in him.<sup>83</sup>

Some of the coordinators expressed open political support for the Banzer dictatorship. Thus, the three who headed the Factory Workers Confederation published a paid advertisement in the La Paz press in June 1976 expressing support of “the economic and social policy of the Supreme Government.”<sup>84</sup>

The one labor group that refused to adhere to the provisions of Decree Law 11,952 was the miners employed by the government firm COMIBOL. The mine union leaders refused to become “coordinators,” and as a result a number of them were sent to jail for five or six months. There were also protest strikes among the miners. The government finally relented, and although it claimed to have named “coordinators” in the mining unions, it, in fact, left them more or less completely in the hands of the elected leadership. However, in the privately owned mines, the government was able to name labor coordinators.

In other ways, too, the miners’ unions maintained their militancy. There were a large number of strikes in individual COMIBOL mines over local issues, although there was no general mine strike. The union leaders continued to bring pressure on the government on a wide range of issues, involving social, economic, and even educational matters.<sup>85</sup>

In May 1976, minister of labor Mario Vargas went so far as to permit the miners' federation to hold its Twenty-sixth Congress. Announcing this, Vargas said:

I hope that the miners give a sense of maturity to their deliberations and that the general interest will win out over personal appetites of persons identified over the years for their incompetence and betrayal of the working class. This authorization signifies another thing, the confidence of the government in the capacity of the workers to discuss their problems, suggesting positive solutions and demonstrating that in the country there is no coercion of the freedom of assembly and expression.<sup>86</sup>

Some 400 delegates attended this congress, from both COMIBOL mines and privately owned ones. There was extensive and sometimes heated debate, and the report of the acting executive secretary (Juan Lechín being in exile), Víctor López Arias, was accepted only after severe criticism. The resolutions adopted by the meeting, among other things, ratified the 1970 Political Thesis of the Central Obrera Boliviana, demanded wage increases, and called for release of all political prisoners and return of exiles and retirement of troops from the mining areas. Juan Lechín was reelected executive secretary, and two other exiled leaders were reelected, Simón Reyes and Filemón Escobar, a pro-Moscow Communist and a Trotskyist, respectively. Other leaders who were still resident in Bolivia were also elected to the new Executive Committee.<sup>87</sup>

Although when I talked to him in July 1975, minister of labor Mario Vargas said that the system of "coordinators" was "temporary" and suggested that it might end at the beginning of the following year, it, in fact, continued until almost the end of the Banzer regime in 1978.

## **ROLE OF AMERICAN INSTITUTE FOR FREE LABOR DEVELOPMENT**

In this very difficult period for the Bolivian labor movement, the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), run by the AFL-CIO and financed by the U.S. government's Agency for International Development (AID), played a peculiar role. The AIFLD had been operating in Bolivia for a number of years, carrying on leadership training courses and "social" projects. It had almost been forced out of the country during the Torres period but had survived.<sup>88</sup>

In the period after November 1974, the AIFLD carried on an extensive leadership training program, as well as some housing and other projects. It was not interfered with by minister of labor

Vargas, probably partly at least because he hoped that the leadership training efforts of AIFLD would produce the kind of new labor leaders that he was searching for and partly because to have interfered with AIFLD might well have put in danger the other projects of the AID in the economic field, which were of considerable use to the Banzer regime.

While walking something of a tightrope, the AIFLD people sought to support the labor movement insofar as possible. They hoped that the AIFLD courses in such things as collective bargaining and collective contract negotiation would strengthen the unions to at least some degree. Also, at the time of the jailing of nine union leaders for refusing to accept posts as "coordinators," the AIFLD sent them food, blankets, and other things when they were in prison.<sup>89</sup> As a consequence, at least some of the leaders of the mine workers' federation worked with the AIFLD.<sup>90</sup>

## **ORGANIZED LABOR FROM BANZER TO THE SECOND HERNÁN SILES REGIME**

In 1977, the Banzer regime announced an *apertura*, that is, a relaxation of the rigidity of the dictatorship, in part as a result of the human rights policy of the government of President Jimmy Carter.<sup>91</sup> This soon got out of hand, from the government's point of view, when in December 1977 a group of women began a hunger strike in the La Paz cathedral. Begun by four wives of imprisoned miners and, according to James Dunkerley, "under the direction of the miners' union (FSTMB), it soon brought President Banzer to concede to most of the hunger strikers' demands for 'full democratic rights.'"<sup>92</sup>

Organized labor quickly took advantage of the relaxation of the dictatorship. Local unions quickly revived. On May 1, 1978, there were May Day demonstrations in most of the cities, and the date was used as an occasion to announce the reestablishment of departmental units of the Central Obrera Boliviana in Oruro and some other cities.<sup>93</sup> James Dunkerley noted that there was "an unexpected strengthening of a labor movement that as recently as 1976 had been reduced to a state of almost complete disintegration by repression. This revival of the working class channelled into a much broader movement headed by the returning reformist politicians, who sought elections and the establishment of a formal bourgeois democracy, an objective that was not challenged by the majority of the parties of the left."<sup>94</sup>

President Banzer called new elections in July 1978. The government candidate was air force general Juan Pereda. Running against him, among others, were the Unión Democrática Popular

(UDP), headed by Hernán Siles and consisting of his Left MNR (MNRI), the new Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionario (MIR), the pro-Soviet Communist Party, and the Paz Estenssoro faction of the MNR, titled MNR Histórico.

Although the UDP claimed victory, the government candidate, Pereda, was declared the victor as a result of a monumental fraud. After several days of confusion, General Pereda seized power, ousting General Banzer.<sup>95</sup>

General Pereda stayed in power only about four months, being overthrown by an insurrection of the "institutionalist" military men, who placed General David Padilla in the presidency, mainly to preside over new elections, in June 1979. James Dunkerley noted, "In its measured populism, desistance from the notable acts of repression, and careful negotiation with the COB . . . the Padilla interregnum was a markedly more prescient response to the growing radicalism of the labour movement than the inept *continuismo* of Pereda."

The June 1979 election was indecisive. The UDP coalition again ran Hernán Siles; Victor Paz Estenssoro was candidate of his faction of the MNR, with Walter Guevara Arce as his running mate and with the somewhat strange support of the pro-Chinese faction of the Communist Party. As Dunkerley observed, "the maoists had been the force on the left to grow most strongly under Banzer and for the first time in many years exercised an influence at the national level both inside and outside the unions," but the Maoist Party "put its radical credentials at risk by following the muddy path alongside 'the most advanced sector of the bourgeoisie.'" <sup>96</sup>

This election resulted in a deadlock. Although Hernán Siles had a slight lead over Paz Estenssoro, the MNR of Paz won a majority in congress. To the surprise of many, the new Nationalist Democratic Action (ADN) party of General Banzer came in a strong third. Congress, which had to decide on the new president, since no one had a clear majority of the votes, rejected both of the leading candidates and chose Walter Guevara Arce as the new president.

During the short-lived Guevara Arce regime, the Central Obrera Boliviana showed a degree of militancy that it had not had since its rebirth in 1978. Dunkerley noted, "The leadership of the COB, which had held itself in check for 15 months, was now forced by rank and file pressure to take an initiative on the economic front and presented a programme that incorporated extensive wage rises, protectionism, expansion of state ownership and wide-ranging fiscal measures for income redistribution. This

plan received broad support from the UDP which did not itself possess a detailed plan of action for the economy."<sup>97</sup>

However, on November 1, 1979, Guevara Arce was overthrown by yet another military coup, led by Alberto Natusch, who became president. Natusch "sought to establish a form of bonapartist regime in which the leading civic organizations participated in administration directed by the armed forces. In this vein he proffered an alliance to both Congress and the COB, neither of which was outlawed for a number of days."<sup>98</sup>

However, neither the urban and mining workers nor the peasants were willing to collaborate with the Natusch regime. Dunkerley noted that "the leadership of the COB lost control of the rank and file of its most powerful arms—the miners. The miners obliged their leader Juan Lechín (also head of the COB), to call a general strike and then ignored him when, after reaffirming it every 24 hours, he attempted to lift it to facilitate negotiations." The miners were joined in the strike by the factory workers in the cities.

Even more significantly, there was "the most emphatically radical mobilization in 30 years on the part of the *campesinado*, which achieved a rare unity in coming out on strike and blocking the major roads." Both the urban and rural strike movements went on for two weeks.<sup>99</sup>

The immediate situation was resolved on November 16, when Lidia Gueller, the president of congress and a dissident leader of Juan Lechín's party, the PRIN (and who had supported Paz Estenssoro in the 1979 election), was named as interim president, to preside over still another election in July 1980.

In spite of her background as a stalwart of the PRIN and having the pro-Chinese Communists in her government, President Lidia Gueller sought to carry out a stabilization program that would enable her government to get help from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). To this end, on November 29 she declared a 25 percent devaluation of the Bolivian currency. This did not generate as much opposition from the COB as might have been expected from its reactions to devaluations in the past. James Dunkerley noted:

The COB, in which the UDP possessed a clear majority, adopted the position that however great its opposition to the devaluation, priority should be given to the preservation of parliamentary democracy and the maintenance of the Gueller administration. As a result, the trade union leadership moved quickly to break any further mobilization by the rank and file which would, in all probability, have resulted in the collapse of the administration and an open confrontation between the working class and the armed forces. This policy on the part of the majority of the COB



leadership contributed to a discernible reflux in the militancy of the industrial labor force, which was exhausted after the general strike and still somewhat confused at its outcome.<sup>100</sup>

However, the peasants reacted strongly against the devaluation, since such economic measures had traditionally hurt the peasants most of all. A new peasants' confederation, the Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos Bolivianos, headed by an Aymara Indian, Genaro Flores, had appeared in the 1970s. It renewed the general strike and blocked roads in the rural areas, although permitting the delivery of food and raw materials to the principal mines and factories. However, since the COB refused its support, the peasant action finally collapsed.<sup>101</sup>

As the 1980 election date approached, the COB joined with the UDP, the MNR, and the Partido Socialista to form the Consejo Nacional de Defensa de la Democracia (CONADE), to plan for united reaction against any new attempted military coup.<sup>102</sup> However, it was to prove ineffective when a new coup was precipitated after the June election.

About two months before the election the miners' federation held a congress. There a major issue was what stance the labor movement, particularly the FSTMB, should take in the election. The pro-Moscow Communist miners' leader Simón Reyes proposed an endorsement of the UDP list. A Trotskyist delegate, Ascensio Cruz, introduced a motion denouncing the whole electoral process. Finally, Juan Lechín put forth the idea that the labor movement should have its own ticket, which was endorsed by the meeting. As a consequence, a ticket headed by Juan Lechín as candidate for president and Genaro Flores as nominee for vice president was launched. Shortly before the election, however, Lechín withdrew from the contest, leaving the electoral position of the labor movement in some confusion.<sup>103</sup>

When the election was held on June 29, 1980, Hernán Siles was clearly in the lead, with over half a million votes, Paz Estenssoro was a clear second, and ex-dictator Banzer was third. Paz immediately indicated that when Congress met, he would support the choice of Siles. There were negotiations between the armed forces leaders and Siles, during which he refused to say that he would confirm in their posts army commander General Luis García, air force chief Waldo Bernal, and Admiral Terrazas, in charge of the navy.

On July 17, 1980, General García seized power in one of the most violent and bloody coups d'état in Bolivian history. James Dunkerley noted:

Radio stations, the COB headquarters, government offices, the presidential palace and all strategic points in La Paz were captured without resistance in lightning raids by paramilitary force using ambulances to mask their approach and provoking a general terror in their operations. CONADE had no time to coordinate a general strike; its leaders, including Lechin, were captured, killed . . . or forced immediately to go underground. In this way potential foci of resistance were eradicated and the leadership of both the union movement and the political parties effectively decapitated.<sup>104</sup>

One of the most important trade union victims of the García Meza coup was Genaro Flores, the head of the Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores Campesinos Bolivianos. The *New York Times* correspondent Warren Hoge wrote about what happened to him:

On the day of the violent takeover, Mr. Flores was in a meeting of labor and political leaders at the downtown headquarters of the Bolivian Workers Central. . . . Noting that both telephones in the building were in constant use, he stepped outside to a public booth to alert his members to begin their road-blocking actions across the country. While he was placing the call, paramilitaries burst into the union building and shot up the conference room, killing five men and taking the rest away for torture.

Flores fled and became head of the COB underground. But, as Warren Hoge reported:

The security forces finally caught up with him on July 19, 1981, as he was in a van leaving a meeting of the Workers Central's clandestine arm, which he had headed since the García Meza coup. Aware that he knew all the names, addresses and activities of the underground members, he resolved not to be taken and made a run for it. Several steps later, rifle fire brought him down. Despite protests from the American, the French and other embassies and international rights groups, he was kept in a police clinic for 27 days and not given the treatment he required. When he finally reached France, doctors there told him it was the delay that had cost him the use of his legs.<sup>105</sup>

The coup leaders captured Juan Lechín. They forced him to go on television and urge the workers to call off the general strike called by CONADE against the new regime, "to avoid further loss of life." James Dunkerley noted, "Although the labour leader looked dishevelled and disoriented, his appeal had a profound

impact and certainly played a part in convincing the urban workers that they had lost their leadership and were left with no choice but to retreat."

As had so often happened in the past, the miners were the last to surrender to the García coup. Armed resistance in the mining camps continued until August 3, when "troops massacred the inhabitants of the isolated Viloco and Caracoles pits."

Although the mining camps "were flooded with troops," a strike broke out in Siglo XX when authorities arrested a number of union leaders in an attempt to end a series of sabotage and slowdown strikes. Dunkerley commented, "The stoppage at the end of October and early November represented the first step in the gradual recovery of the miners and propelled the formation of clandestine unions which, while experiencing difficulties in communications, provided the basis for the regeneration of the COB in the interior."<sup>106</sup>

From time to time there continued to be strikes against the García Meza regime. On January 11, 1981, a general strike of forty-eight hours was proclaimed by the country's underground urban unions, and on the next day the miners joined this walk-out, also for forty-eight hours.<sup>107</sup> On May 18, 1981, there was another general strike, this time for twenty-four hours, in most of the more important mines.<sup>108</sup> On July 19, there was a general strike in Santa Cruz, supported not only by the unions but also by the region's entrepreneurs. At the same time, a twenty-four-hour strike was declared in the Huanuni mines.<sup>109</sup>

This military government called itself the Government of National Reconstruction. In fact, it was the government of the cocaine trade. Top officials of the administration, including the minister of interior, General Arce, were direct participants in the drug trade. Arce organized a special police force, the Servicio Especial de Seguridad, to terrorize the citizenry.

The drug dealers' government aroused the opposition not only of most of the civilian population but also of a substantial part of the military, who considered the open participation of the military chiefs in the cocaine business to be an insult to the armed forces. The government also confronted the strong opposition of the U.S. government, under both Presidents Carter and Reagan, because of its drug connections, an opposition that was to be significant in the final unraveling of the regime.

Insofar as the labor movement was concerned, the García Meza regime outlawed all existing unions. The only "labor" organization it tolerated was the Transport Workers Confederation, which was really made up of small owners of trucks and buses.<sup>110</sup>

The García Meza regime took a leaf out of Banzer's book and established a system of government-appointed "*relacionadores*" ("intermediaries") to represent the workers. Over 1,000 functionaries were named by the government. At the same time, Decree 17531 of July 21, 1980, "suppressed all labor rights granted under the 1967 Constitution. . . . Another decree, #17610, declared the existence of a "social pact" between workers and employers.

However, James Dunkerley noted that "the regime was never able to impose a 'yellow' apparatus in any other than a coercive and superficial manner; when, by mid-1981, this apparatus came under pressure from rank and file militancy it began to disintegrate remarkably quickly."<sup>111</sup> But it took time for this to happen.

Mounting opposition, not only from the labor movement but from much of the entrepreneurial class and the Catholic Church, as well as the U.S. government, finally forced the resignation of President-General García Meza on August 4, 1981. On September 6, General Celsio Torrelío was inaugurated as the new president.

Although General Torrelío had been a close associate of García Meza, he soon made clear that he was going to follow a quite different labor policy from that of his predecessor. He immediately issued a call for a "social truce." This call quickly brought a reply from the workers of the Huanuni mine, who said that such a "truce" was possible only if trade union rights were restored, all jailed labor leaders were freed, permission was given to those in exile to return, and there was acceptance of the proposal of the National Wage Commission that a system of sliding wage scales be adjusted to inflation.<sup>112</sup>

However, relations between the labor movement and President Torrelío remained tense. In November there was a general strike in the mines.<sup>113</sup>

A major step was taken in December 1981, when the minister of labor met at length with a delegation of mine workers, who were also received by the president. Out of this meeting came an agreement for the restoration of the legal labor movement. It called for immediate elections in each work center for a representative committee and said that subsequently all unions would be reestablished within 90 days, all federations and confederations would be reestablished within 180 days, and "the national leadership of the workers of Bolivia," in other words, the COB, would be legally restored within one year.<sup>114</sup>

In the following months, the miners' "grassroots committees" called for in this agreement were elected. In the case of the Huanuni mine those elected were the former members of the Executive Committee of the local union.<sup>115</sup> Presumably, the same thing occurred with many other workers' groups.

However, economic stabilization measures announced by the Torrelio government in January 1982 threatened to cause serious difficulties between the government and the workers. The underground leadership of the COB called a forty-eight-hour strike in the mines and a twenty-four-hour one in the cities, a call that was widely adhered to.<sup>116</sup>

Labor unrest continued in March. The COB again called a general strike for March 28 and 29, in protest against the government's economic measures. It was reported that six people were killed in Cochabamba when paramilitary groups attacked a demonstrating crowd estimated at 10,000 people.<sup>117</sup> This walkout was only partly successful, being only partially observed in Sucre and Potosí and hardly at all in Santa Cruz.<sup>118</sup>

A further general strike was called by the COB late in May. This was more successful, and as a result of it, President Torrelio granted general amnesty to all exiles and legally recognized the Central Obrera Boliviana.<sup>119</sup>

In July, the COB organized a series of "hunger marches" in the country's principal cities, in protest against the government's economic policies. In the meeting at the end of this march in La Paz, Oscar Sanjinés, secretary-general of the COB, announced that the labor movement was not interested in any further negotiations with the government and called for the reestablishment of a civilian regime on the basis of the elections of 1980, the results of which had been canceled by the García Meza coup.<sup>120</sup>

In August 1982, the miners' federation held its Nineteenth Congress. There it adopted what it called an "anti-imperialist and anti-oligarchic program," which included demands for suspension of payment of the country's foreign debt, nationalization of the banking system and a state monopoly of all foreign trade.<sup>121</sup>

Meanwhile, on July 21, 1982, the military decided to replace President Torrelio with General Guido Vildoso. Upon taking office, he announced that he not only would restore trade union rights but would also call new elections for April 1983.<sup>122</sup>

However, the placing of still another general in the presidency did not assuage the labor movement. New hunger marches were organized by departmental affiliates of the COB, the one in La Paz reportedly rallying 80,000 people. On September 16, the COB called a nationwide general strike of indefinite duration, with the demand that "a solution be found immediately to the current economic and political crisis."<sup>123</sup>

This walkout brought the surrender of the military government. President Vildoso announced that he was calling back into session the congress, which had been dissolved at the time of the García Meza coup two years before, so that it could elect a new

president. Although the COB at first opposed this idea and called for new elections immediately, it finally accepted it. Congress met on October 5, 1982 and elected Hernán Siles, who had been the leading candidate in 1980 and the prospect of whose election was the immediate cause of the García Meza coup.

The election of ex-president Hernán Siles opened a new chapter in the history of Bolivia and its labor movement.

## **ORGANIZED LABOR DURING THE SECOND SILES ADMINISTRATION**

When Hernán Siles returned to the presidency, he was faced with a catastrophic economic situation. Production in both agricultural and industrial sectors was falling, inflation was virtually out of control, and previous military regimes had piled up a foreign debt of about \$4 billion. In the year following his return to the presidency, nature itself seemed determined to compound the problems his government had to deal with: there were droughts in the altiplano area and ruinous floods in the east, which caused a reported one-third drop in food production, including the loss of 80 percent of the output of potatoes—a staple in the national diet.<sup>124</sup>

Siles was thus faced from the beginning of his second administration with the need to try to develop a program to mitigate the inflation and was under constant pressure from the International Monetary Fund and Bolivia's creditors to continue to make payments on the foreign debt. On each occasion that he attempted to launch an economic stabilization program, he ran into strong resistance from the organized labor movement and the parties active within it. As a consequence, although he had taken power with the strong support of the organized workers and of most of the country's civilians, during the last phase of his second administration, Siles was faced with demands by Juan Lechín and other labor leaders associated with the COB that he resign from the presidency.

Juan Lechín expressed what was probably a widely accepted labor view of the Siles government right after it took power. He said, "This is not the workers government. It is a democratic government that we have put in power because we didn't want the military any more, and because it was the one voted in by the people in the last election." However, one Trotskyist writer at the time noted that "most miners were enthusiastic about the new regime. It represented a real change compared to the military dictatorship. Everyone felt that it had been put in power as a result of the workers' mobilization."<sup>125</sup>

With this assumption of the presidency, Hernán Siles formed a cabinet composed of leaders of the three parties that had backed his candidacy: his own Left MNR, the *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria*, and the pro-Soviet Communist Party. However, he sought to broaden the base of his administration, an issue that caused the first discrepancy between Siles and the labor leadership.

The president invited the *Central Obrera Boliviana* to name members of his government. Juan Lechín, speaking for the COB, demanded half of the posts in the cabinet and said that "the only way the COB would accept co-government would be on the basis of an economic program of liberation, that is, an anti-imperialist one without any ties to the International Monetary Fund." Lechín also demanded that Siles "declare a moratorium on foreign debt payments, sell off Bolivia's gold reserves, cut military spending by 50 percent, impose strict currency controls, and take steps to improve workers' economic conditions." At that point, further discussion about direct COB participation in the Siles administration lapsed, at least for the time being.<sup>126</sup>

Only weeks after coming into office, in November 1982, Siles put forth his first economic stabilization program. This called, among other things, for curtailing subsidies for such things as sugar, rice, and cooking oil and raising the prices of bread and gasoline by 150 percent. It also provided for a 30 percent general wage increase followed by a wage freeze. This provoked strikes in some mines and by the Transport Workers Confederation (made up largely of owners of small trucks and buses). However, the COB leaders agreed on the establishment of a 100-day "social pact," to run through February 1983.<sup>127</sup>

In January 1983, President Siles again invited the COB officially to join his administration. At that time, COB secretary-general Oscar Sanjinés Rodríguez told journalists, "The president of the nation has reiterated his intention to offer the COB the opportunity to participate in the governing coalition. We will consult with the federation's members. However, I dare say that I know the COB leaders' views. We will participate in the democratic process, but not in the government coalition."<sup>128</sup>

In March 1983, President Siles' "economic team" proposed a significant devaluation of the Bolivian currency and an increase in fuel prices. At that point, Simón Reyes, the most important pro-Soviet Communist leader of the COB, said, "The COB clearly stated then its opposition to a devaluation of the peso and also to an increase in fuel prices. Thus, even then, the COB was defending these two aspects, before the government decided to maintain the dollar exchange rate and also to maintain fuel prices."<sup>129</sup>

Labor unrest rose sharply during 1983. In March, civil servants declared a twenty-four-hour general strike to protest a provision of the Labor Code that forbade them to form legally recognized unions. This walkout had the backing of the COB.<sup>130</sup>

In April 1983, the Mine Workers Federation "intervened" (took control of) the Corporación Minera de Bolivia, the government-mining firm, taking over its headquarters in La Paz. Juan Lechín explained that the FSTMB was doing this "to safeguard national interests because we want to maintain production even if it is only at the present low rate. . . . Comibol's production has decreased due to the incompetence of its professionals." This move had the support of the COB.<sup>131</sup>

In August 1983, the COB called for a number of demonstrations throughout the country. At that point, these demonstrations were not hostile to the Siles government. It was reported that "thousands of Bolivian workers expressed in the streets their support of democracy and their rejection of coup attempts. They also asked the government to adopt solutions to the economic crisis."<sup>132</sup>

At the same time, in August 1983, the COB put forth for the first time its own program for dealing with the economic crisis. Among its suggestions were that the distribution of food products be put jointly in the hands of the COB and its Peasants Confederation; that the government sell the Central Bank's gold reserves and use the proceeds "for the importation of basic necessities"; that the COMIBOL, YPFB, and the Social Security Fund be permitted directly to import raw materials, machinery, and other requirements; that payments on the foreign debt be postponed "until the conditions of the national economy allow the fulfillment of all foreign commitments"; that the private banks be audited by the government so as to find out their international commitments; and the canceling of all existing oil concessions to foreign companies.<sup>133</sup>

Perhaps the most controversial demands in this "emergency socioeconomic plan" of the COB concerned labor management of both the public and private sectors of the economy, as well as the government itself. It proposed that the workers be given majority control of all state-owned enterprises as well as that the COB have a majority of the seats in President Siles' cabinet. It likewise proposed "co-management" of organized labor in all large private enterprises, Juan Lechín arguing that "it is not honest businessmen who fear that workers may inspect their account books, but those who commit fraud against the government, who evade taxes or who have two 'sets of accounts.'" This program was presented to President Siles by COB secretary-general Oscar Sanjinés, as



the *sina qua non* for COB participation in the Siles administration.

U.S. ambassador Edwin Corr made an unusual public statement supporting the rejection by the Confederation of Private Businessmen of the COB's demand for "co-management" by labor of private firms.<sup>134</sup> Juan Lechín promptly replied to the ambassador, saying:

The COB rejects Ambassador Corr's interference in Bolivian domestic affairs. . . . It has never been insinuated that labor co-management in the large private business sector presupposes nationalization. On the contrary, it is the only way to make sure that the currency that the government economic sector grants to the private sector is really invested in production, and that the accounting books are precisely that and not a mere tool used to commit fraud against the country and workers. It is a means to stop tax evasion and avoid the flight of currency, which in the last 5 years has surpassed \$1.5 billion.<sup>135</sup>

President Siles did not accept the COB's "emergency socioeconomic plan," and so the COB remained outside the administration. Relations between the Siles government and organized labor continued to deteriorate. In the latter months of 1983, a strike wave spread. In October, the walkouts included a weeklong work stoppage for a "basic wage" in seven mining areas; a walkout for salary increases called by the Bolivian Teachers Confederation, in which the La Paz teachers refused to participate; and a strike of doctors and nurses in state hospitals that the COB asked to be called off "due to the serious effects it is having on the people."<sup>136</sup>

When, in mid-November, the Siles government announced a new series of measures designed to curb the rampant inflation, the COB reacted very strongly. Juan Lechín labeled the measures "senseless, illegal and shameless," and the COB carried out a twenty-four-hour general strike that was reported as "paralyzing" the country.<sup>137</sup>

Then, late in February 1984, President Siles again took drastic measures to try to slow the inflation and the decline in the international value of the Bolivian currency. He declared a 400 percent devaluation of the peso and suspended subsidies to basic food items, provoking increases of 200 percent in their prices, while maintaining wages frozen. The Madrid, Spain, newspaper *El País* described what followed: "The trade union protests began immediately, in the midst of frustrated negotiations and internal divisions leading to the resignation last April of Juan Lechín Oquendo, principal leader of the COB. The resignation was ephemeral, because Lechín returned to his post in a few days,

claiming that 'the sound of sabres' was increasing, and reestablishing his privileged contacts with Siles Zuazo."<sup>138</sup>

The country's economic crisis continued to deepen. In the first six months of 1984, prices went up 1,1041 percent, and the exchange value of the Bolivian peso fell 90 percent between October 1983 and the end of June 1984.<sup>139</sup>

In May 1984, President Siles and his "economic team" reached an agreement with the COB that made two major concessions to the labor leaders. It provided for suspension for four years of payments on the part of the foreign debt owed to private foreign commercial banks and for establishment of a system of price controls for at least six months.<sup>140</sup>

When, on June 30, 1984, President Siles was kidnapped in an attempt by right-wing military and civilian elements to overthrow the regime, there was strong popular reaction, and the labor movement organized mass marches in La Paz and elsewhere against this attempted coup, which was brought quickly to an end and achieved the release of President Siles.<sup>141</sup>

However, within five days of the attempted coup, the COB launched a general strike "of indefinite duration" to protest against the government's economic policies. It claimed that President Siles had not carried out the May agreement with the COB. The strike was almost totally successful, with only water, light, and telephone services being maintained.<sup>142</sup>

This walkout ended after three days, following a new agreement between the government and the COB, which a COB leader describes as "a resounding victory for the worker." The government agreed totally to suspend all payments on the foreign debt, decreed a 30 percent general wage increase retroactive to April, and agreed to negotiate further on establishment of a wage system tied to cost of living increases and on freezing of prices of basic goods.<sup>143</sup>

This agreement between the Siles government and the COB was no more enduring than those that had preceded it. In November and early December 1984, the COB carried out the longest general strike in the country's history, which was finally brought to an end on December 4 with an agreement that involved a new accord to freeze prices of essential goods, to limit price increases by transport companies, to use foreign reserves to benefit COMIBOL and YPFB, and other measures. However, before three weeks had passed, the COB was again accusing the government of renegeing on what had been agreed upon.<sup>144</sup>

According to figures issued by the Ministry of Labor in January 1985, there had been 500 strikes in Bolivia in 1984, of which 61.2 percent were for wage demands, and 38.8 percent were for

other things. There had been 100 twenty-four-hour strikes, 76 forty-eight-hour ones, and 17 for seventy-two hours, and 232 had been called for indefinite periods. There had also been 21 slow-downs and 44 hunger strikes. The COB had declared 6 general strikes, 1 for forty-eight hours, 1 for seventy-two hours, and 4 for an indefinite period. A total of thirty workdays had been lost in those walkouts. It also noted that there had been numerous strikes by groups of workers who were legally forbidden to walk out.<sup>145</sup>

Although at the time of the November–December 1984 general strike President Siles had decided to leave office one year ahead of the scheduled end of his term and had called for elections for June 1985, hostility between the government and the leaders of organized labor intensified in the interim. On February 12, 1985, a national emergency congress of the COB decided on a change in tactics in its struggle against the Siles administration's economic policies. Instead of relying only on general strikes, the COB decided upon a tactic of "protest marches throughout the country. These marches will demonstrate that the people have enough of this misgovernment and will be a repudiation of the oligarchy, contraband, and the speculation practiced by banks, foreign exchange shops, and large commercial enterprises."<sup>146</sup>

In pursuit of this new policy, the COB called a new general strike on March 8, which lasted until March 24. This was in protest against new government moves that had devalued the peso from 9,000 pesos to the U.S. dollar, to 45,000 pesos. As a consequence of this government move, prices had risen 400 percent, and the government offered a 322 percent wage increase. The COB demanded a 500 percent wage increase, which the government rejected.<sup>147</sup>

In pursuit of their new tactics, the COB brought some 10,000 miners into La Paz. As the British publication *Weekly Report* noted, there were "dynamite-backed demonstrations by the miners" in the capital city. As that publication also observed, the COB leaders had not only economic motives for the walkout and demonstrations but political ones as well. It said that they were seeking "to call off the elections, provoke a military coup, or at least secure President Siles' resignation." According to this source, "support for the strike was desultory beyond the public sector. The peasants, keen to deliver their harvests to the markets, held back; transport workers . . . did not strike; trains were halted only the first week, and the higher-paid oil industry workers kept supplies flowing."<sup>148</sup>

This general strike and massive demonstration by the mine workers was a serious defeat for the COB leadership. José María Calvo of the Spanish news agency EFE wrote:

A minimum wage increase from 935,000 pesos to 4,035,900 pesos (some \$30 on the black market), promises to control the prices of staples, to improve supplies, and little more has been achieved. . . . Of course, the COB failed to achieve the overthrow of constitutional President Hernán Siles Zuazo, as Lechín had demanded, and the proclamation of a workers' government, as Delgadillo [COB secretary-general] had called for. In addition, the workers failed to achieve a minimum inflation-adjusted salary, which was the main goal of this mobilization.<sup>149</sup>

Apparently encouraged by its defeat of the COB's "maxim effort," the Siles administration decreed a still further devaluation of 75 percent in the international value of the Bolivian peso on April 13. It also ended government subsidies on food and fuel, reportedly bringing price rises of up to 600 percent in such items as flour, bread, cooking oil, urban bus transport, and intercity rail travel. These measures provoked two further three-day general strike calls by the COB in April and May. However, this time the government did not even pretend to make concessions to the COB leadership. Furthermore, Siles announced that henceforward it would reserve 25 percent of the country's foreign-exchange earnings to renew payments on the foreign debt.<sup>150</sup>

Thus, Hernán Siles, whose return to power three years before had been largely brought about by the organized labor movement, had been converted, in the eyes of the principal COB leaders, into one of their worst enemies. However, he had succeeded in overcoming their efforts to overthrow his administration and turned the presidential sash over to his elected successor on August 6, 1995.

## **ORGANIZED LABOR IN THE 1985-1989 PAZ ESTENSSORO ADMINISTRATION**

The person to whom Hernán Siles turned over power was Victor Paz Estenssoro, the first president of the Bolivian National Revolution of 1952, who returned to office with a different program from that he had thirty-three years before. This time he was determined to take drastic measures to do away with the virtually uncontrolled inflation and particularly to "restructure" the government-owned segment of the mining industry, which for many years had lost money and had been a major cause of the inflation. To attempt to do this, Victor Paz inevitably entered into violent

conflict with the labor movement, particularly the miners' federation.

Before putting forth the details of his program, President Paz Estenssoro met with the leaders of the Central Obrera Boliviana. After this meeting, the COB secretary-general said that the president "has promised to respect all social benefits that the workers have obtained so far, such as comanagement of certain enterprises, job stability and many others." However, a communiqué of the COB issued after the meeting emphasized that "the COB will not sway from its line of behavior, which has always been to serve the workers and their historic interests, which means that it will not support any economic or social measures that, in the final analysis, will have to abide by the guidelines of the IMF and international private banks."<sup>151</sup>

However, soon after this meeting Paz Estenssoro announced on August 29 a drastic program to curb inflation, which was estimated to be running at the rate of 14,000 percent a year. This program inevitably brought him into headlong confrontation with organized labor. Among other things, which were to go into effect on September 1, 1985, were a 95 percent devaluation of the Bolivian peso, a four-month wage freeze, ending of subsidies of goods sold in the *pulperías* in the mines, and other government enterprises. Some 11,000 government jobs were eliminated, companies were granted the unlimited right to fire workers, and the price of gasoline was raised 1,000 percent.<sup>152</sup>

The COB responded to this program at first by calling a forty-eight-hour general strike of protest, which was then extended by an additional seventy-two hours, and finally was converted into a general walkout of indeterminate length. In the month that followed, there were large demonstrations of protest in La Paz and other cities, augmented by hunger strikes declared by many of the principal trade union leaders and by the workers in some of the COMIBOL mines. The government reacted by declaring a state of siege on September 19 and arresting several hundred of the principal leaders of the COB and its affiliates and by exiling a number of these—including Juan Lechín—to isolated towns in the tropical eastern part of the country. The state of siege was, after some confusion, ratified by a majority of congress.

On several occasions, the by then underground leadership of the COB demanded "consultations" with the government, as well as release of all those labor leaders who had been arrested. However, Paz Estenssoro and his ministers replied to this by saying that they would not negotiate until the general strike and the hunger strikes had been called off.<sup>153</sup>

The conclusion of this conflict was a clear defeat for organized labor and its leadership. On October 2, an agreement was announced between the COB and the government. The Spanish news service EFE reported:

Some COB leaders, mainly miners' leaders, issued a document on behalf of the labor organizations lifting the general strike decreed on 4 September and the hunger strike that began on 16 September. The COB document stated that "the labor conflicts caused by the new economic policy under implementation as of 29 August will be dealt with within the framework of the labor code. For its part, the government promised to release the labor leaders who were banished to localities in the Bolivian jungles, many of whom already returned to La Paz. However, the state of siege will not be lifted. Under the terms of the agreement . . . a joint commission will analyze the economic model imposed by the Paz Estenssoro administration, but without changing its essential features."<sup>154</sup>

Clearly, the COB had been unable to make the government alter its economic program. The administration's only concession was to release those labor leaders who had been jailed.

The defeat of the COB in September 1985 was followed by a few months of relative calm. However, the country's economic problems were further complicated by a severe drop in the price of tin, still the nation's most important export.<sup>155</sup>

Conflicts between the Paz Estenssoro government and organized labor continued. The government provided new issues against which the unions protested. These included the introduction of a new value-added tax, the decision to resume payment on the country's foreign debt, the presence in Bolivia of a small number of U.S. soldiers in connection with the campaign to eradicate the cocaine trade, and the government's decision to close down many of the uneconomic mines.

The COB used several tactics in trying to confront the government. Early in March 1996, it staged demonstrations in most of the country's cities.<sup>156</sup> In April it called a twenty-four-hour general strike against the government's refusal to raise teachers' salaries, which was effective in La Paz but less so in several of the interior cities.<sup>157</sup> In late July, the COB organized a "general consultation" on the issues of the value-added tax and renewal of foreign debt payments: the COB and opposition political parties established "polling places" in their headquarters, where people could come in and cast their "votes" for or against these two measures. The COB announced that this "consultation" had been held on July 25, for eighth consecutive hours in 90 percent of the major cities. Not surprisingly, the "votes" cast were strongly against the two measures involved.<sup>158</sup>

However, from the trade unions' point of view, the Paz Estenssoro government's most serious measure was the closing of many of the mines, resulting in the first year of the administration in the dismissal of an estimated 7,000 miners.<sup>159</sup> Largely because of this, the COB once again called a forty-eight-hour general strike of protest on August 21-22, 1986. The government's information minister, Hernán Antelo, announced on the first day of the walk-out that

reports received at Government House and at the Interior Ministry state that tranquility prevails throughout the national territory and that the strike or general stoppage called by the COB is being partially observed. In some departments it is being strictly observed and in others only partially. In some departments, like Trinidad and Santa Cruz, the strike is hardly noticed while in other departments, like Oruro and Potosí, which have already been paralyzed, the strike is more noticeable.

This walkout was perhaps most effective in the mining center of Oruro. There were demonstrations in the city, with delegations from all of the mines of the area participating. Simón Reyes was the principal speaker, and he announced the decision to send large "delegates" of miners to La Paz and some other cities.<sup>160</sup>

The departure a week later of some 7,000 miners of the Oruro area for La Paz to protest the government's policies, particularly those dealing with the mining industry, resulted in the administration's once again declaring a state of siege. A midnight to 6 a.m. curfew was established, union headquarters in La Paz were blockaded by the police, and more than 250 people, including union leaders, opposition politicians, and churchmen who had expressed support for the COB and the miners were reportedly arrested. At the same time, troops were sent to intercept the miners coming from Oruro, who were surrounded some forty-five miles from the capital and, apparently without armed resistance, were loaded into trucks and returned to Oruro.<sup>161</sup>

The miners' federation launched a twenty-four-hour strike against the state of siege, as well as declaring a hunger strike. The *New York Times* reported that "about 20,000 workers walked off their jobs at 23 operating state mines." The Catholic Bishops' Conference also protested the government's actions. The conference's president, Bishop Julio Terrazas, claimed, "The miners have been humiliated by the Government. . . . Their demands are just and they should not have been treated this way."<sup>162</sup>

On September 15, an "agreement" was signed between the miners' federation and the government. In it, the government pledged that it would develop "a national employment program" to provide jobs for displaced miners and that COMIBOL would "seek

the opinion of professional organizations such as universities . . . before closing down a production or service organization." However, it also said, "Technical studies conducted by Comibol and other advisers have recommended that the total work force of Comibol should total approximately 13,000 workers. These guidelines will be used as a reference when systematically implementing the overall recovery program."<sup>163</sup>

The miners' federation clearly suffered a major defeat in this confrontation with the government. Just before the miners' strike, the government had announced that it intended soon to close seven of the twenty-four functioning mines,<sup>164</sup> and the agreement between the FSTMB and the government gave no indication that the decision was to be reversed. The COB endorsed the agreement with the miners, merely saying that it would call for a renewed hunger strike if the government did not fulfill the promises made in the accord.<sup>165</sup>

Christopher Mitchell has summed up the impact on the mining industry of the 1985–1989 Paz Estenssoro administration. He said, "More than 75 per cent of the miners employed by the state mining corporation . . . were discharged, effectively breaking the power of the nation's strongest, most militant labor union."<sup>166</sup> Many of the displaced miners reportedly turned to the drug trade as the only viable way to make a living.<sup>167</sup>

Undoubtedly, one factor that weakened the labor movement's resistance to the economic program of the Paz Estenssoro government was the success of that program in curbing inflation. Whereas prices had been increasing at the rate of 20,000 percent a year when Paz Estenssoro returned to power, a year later that rate had been reduced to 20 percent.<sup>168</sup> Although the miners in particular paid a terrible price to bring that reduction about, many other workers undoubtedly benefited from the slowing down of inflation, and their willingness to defy the government on the issue of its economic policy had been much reduced. Although the gross domestic product of the Bolivian economy had declined 30 percent in the early 1980s, it rose by 2 percent by 1988.<sup>169</sup>

One casualty of the COB's crisis of 1985–1986 was Juan Lechín. In June 1986 he stated his intention of retiring as head of the Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros de Bolivia. He announced, "I am now convinced that after 42 years of an intensive, aggressive, and bold struggle, with great creativity on the part of the rank and file, not only the workers' but the country's standard of living has not improved. Thus, in my opinion, the only alternative is the political approach, political activity."<sup>170</sup>



Lechín's resignation as executive secretary of the FSTMB was accepted in June 1986. At that time, the pro-Soviet Communist leader Simón Reyes was chosen to succeed him. However, when the agreement that Reyes had signed with the government was repudiated by a special congress of the miners' federation on September 27, he resigned and was succeeded as executive secretary by Víctor López Arias, who until then had been general secretary. López was chosen as a result of negotiations of the pro-Soviet Communists with various other political groups within the FSTMB.<sup>171</sup>

In the following year, Juan Lechín also lost his position as executive secretary of the Central Obrera Boliviana, a post he had held since the establishment of the COB in 1952. Once again, Simón Reyes was Juan Lechín's immediate successor. He had been defeated by Lechín in the COB's Ninth Congress, where not only Lechín's own Partido Revolucionaria de la Izquierda Nacionalista, but Trotskyist groups and others supported Lechín. However, in the 1987 congress of the COB, when the "Axis," which supported Lechín, insisted that in reelecting him the COB also endorsed Lechín's call for a guerrilla warfare against the Paz Estenssoro government, "the 17" coalition headed by the pro-Soviet Communists repudiated Lechín's position and, having a majority in the congress, elected Simón Reyes as Lechín's successor as head of the COB.<sup>172</sup>

In the 1987 congress, also, the COB voted to join the World Federation of Trade Unions, the pro-Moscow Communist-controlled world labor group. However, by the early 1990s, the COB was said by Rodolfo Eróstegui to be controlled by "trade union representatives affiliated to Social Democratic parties. . . . There are also representatives of the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria, MIR, and Unión Cívica Solidaridad."<sup>173</sup>

In spite of the bitter showdown between President Victor Paz Estenssoro and the organized labor movement in 1985-1986, and the defeat of the COB in that struggle, this did not mean the end of all contact between the president and the labor leadership. Rodolfo Eróstegui noted that, in spite of the 1985-1986 battles, "this has not been an obstacle, starting in 1987, for the central labor group of the Bolivian workers to present in the month of January a Petition and for the government for its part to give the COB a copy of the General Budget of the Nation, to be discussed together with the Petition at the negotiating table."

Eróstegui commented, "This act of mutual recognition can be regarded as one of the great transformations undergone by Bolivian society in the six years . . . with the interpretation of the various social actors of what democracy should be in Bolivia."<sup>174</sup>

## NEOLIBERALISM AND THE BOLIVIAN LABOR MOVEMENT

Although at the beginning of the 1985–1989 Paz Estenssoro government its economic program was just seen, even by the labor movement, as an effort to deal with the country's runaway inflation, it was, in fact, something more than that. It was in the longer run an application of the theory and practice of neoliberalism.

Rodolfo ErósteGUI sketched the significance of this basic change in the country's economy and society. He wrote:

Neoliberalism, which entered the country with Supreme Decree (DS) 21060 of August 29, 1985 was not just a program of stabilization . . . but along with that, began a process of restructuring of the national economy, a change in the axis of accumulation—from the State to the private sector. . . . For these reasons, we can say without fear of being mistaken that by end of the present decade, none of the institutions created after the revolution of 1952 will remain the same. Bolivia is transformed most dramatically.<sup>175</sup>

ErósteGUI noted the short-term and long-term effects of this adoption of neoliberalism. By October 1986 some 23,000 government workers were dismissed, and by 1987 employment in the government tin firm COMIBOL had dropped from 28,000 to only 6,000. At the same time, in the private sector between 1985 and 1989, some 1,346 firms went bankrupt, throwing 32,255 workers out of their jobs. Overall, 11 percent of those who were wage earners in 1985 had lost their employment by 1989.

Concurrent with these events in the "formal" economy, employment in the "informal" economy had risen from 482,000 in 1985 to 618,000 in 1989. In addition, the working conditions of those in the formal economy had drastically altered for the worse. Whereas in 1985 there had been 45,000 workers in La Paz with "permanent" jobs, four years later this number had been reduced to 14,000, the rest being employed only on a "temporary" basis. These changes were reflected in the Bolivian Social Security Institute, which in 1983 had 368,000 workers covered but in 1988 had only 142,000, the rest being either unemployed or employed in jobs that were not covered by social security.<sup>176</sup>

However, the long-term effects of neoliberalism presented even worse prospects for the Bolivian working class. One effect of the great growth of the informal economy was that large numbers of children entered the labor market, instead of going to school. As Rodolfo Eróstegui wrote:

This situation forces a large percentage of children of school age of families with low incomes not to go to school at the present time. This will mean in the future that this child when he has to enter the labor market, now cannot complement the family income, cannot do so since the technological transformation of production will require a much more qualified work force than he can offer the labor market. . . . Furthermore . . . we would be slowly beginning the process of lumpenization of the labor force, in other words, we are, in the first years of the decade of the nineties incubating potential elements of violence.

In connection with this situation, the government reduced educational expenditures. They fell in terms of 1985 prices from 87,000,000 bolivianos in 1980 to 62,000,000 bolivianos in 1988.<sup>177</sup>

The labor movement was not in a position to confront effectively these developments. Not only had it lost, through the reduction of the number of people employed in the mines, the strength of what had been the backbone of the Bolivian labor movement, the Federación de Trabajadores Mineros, but it had been unable to develop an alternative source of strength. The teachers remained the largest group of organized workers, and in general organized labor came to consist in large degree of middle-class people.

Furthermore, there was a growing divorce between the urban workers and the peasants. In the 1989 congress of the Central Obrera Boliviana, the peasant delegates left the meeting feeling that their interests were not being adequately dealt with.

Thus, in the society as a whole, organized labor became much less significant, socially and politically, than it had been ever since 1952. This was due in part to the overall decline of the number of workers in the formal sector of the economy, in which the labor movement had been concentrated, but also to its apparent inability to penetrate the informal sector. By 1990 this situation had been made even more serious by the defection of the peasants.<sup>178</sup>

## CONCLUSION

With the overthrow of the revolutionary government of the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario in November 1964, the

Bolivian labor movement entered a long period of travail and struggle. Succeeding military regimes treated it with many different attitudes, from tolerance, to disdain, to outright persecution. There was no further possibility of its aspiring to "co-government," and the fleeting periods of renewed aspiration to that role during the *asamblea popular* of 1970–1971 and the second administration of President Hernán Siles in 1982–1985 proved short-lived and disastrous.

Nor was the Bolivian labor movement any more able in the post-1964 period than in the past to develop the kind of institutionalized collective bargaining system that to a greater or lesser degree, existed in most other Latin American countries—as well as in the so-called First World industrialized countries. There never developed a recognized procedure for periodical negotiation of collective agreements, setting forth the rights and obligations of both the employers and the unions, together with governmental machinery to encourage and/or regulate the negotiating process.

The Bolivian labor movement itself seems to have seldom consciously thought of trying to develop such a regularized collective bargaining system. One reason for this was undoubtedly the fact that the country's particularly turbulent political history militated against an enduring process of regularized and periodical collective bargaining, as did the country's almost interminable series of economic crises.

However, another factor that was of great importance in this situation was undoubtedly employer resistance to such a routine collective bargaining process. Rodolfo Eróstegui, dealing specifically with the latter part of the 1985–1989 Paz Estenssoro administration, wrote a description of the employers' attitudes, which could with equal validity have dealt with virtually all of the history of the Bolivian labor movement. He said:

The employers . . . until now have been maintaining and implementing this logic of war in resolution of labor conflicts. In other words, the great absent one in one of the most important aspects of democracy is private enterprise, which systematically refuses to participate in the process of negotiation, and furthermore to get the businessman to sit down to negotiate with the workers in his own factory it was necessary for the state to issue decrees . . . obliging the businessman to negotiate wages with his workers once a year.<sup>179</sup>

By 1990, with the country's armed forces having retreated into the political background, organized labor remained one of the country's important pressure groups. However, it enjoyed no recognized right to sit down with the nation's employers, individually or collectively, to negotiate the terms and conditions of their

workers' employment. It had lost, at least for the time being, its ability to overthrow governments and to represent a viable threat of taking power itself.

## NOTES

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29. Delgado Gonzáles, op. cit., pages 358-359.
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31. For details on this coup and countercoup, see Gallardo Lozada, *op. cit.*, pages 51–84.

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39. Lora, *op. cit.*, page 264.

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44. *Ibid.*, page 374.

45. *Ibid.*, page 379.

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48. Interview with Guillermo Bedregal, onetime subchief of Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario, in New York City, April 12, 1972.

49. Lora, *op. cit.*, pages 364–365.

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51. *Ibid.*, page 389.

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54. For extensive details on this Banzer coup, see Gallardo Lozada, *op. cit.*, pages 417–496.

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# Index

- AFL-CIO, 148  
Agency for International Development, 131  
Agrarian Reform Commission, 82  
Aguilar Peñarrieta, Aníbal, 106  
Aguirre Gainsborg, José, 14, 39  
AIFLD. *See* American Institute for Free Labor Development  
Alandía Pontoja, Miguel, 79, 81  
Alcoba, Aurelio, 38, 44, 55, 59  
Almaraz, Sergio, 82, 89  
Alvarez, Waldo, 38, 41, 42, 85  
American Federation of Labor, 48  
American Institute for Free Labor Development, 146, 147, 149  
Anaya, Ricardo, 14, 38, 39  
Aramayo family mines, 9, 76, 92  
Arce, General, 154  
Arce Loureiro, Eduardo, 14, 39, 42  
Argentine Socialist Party, 17  
Arguedas, Antonio, 127  
Armed Forces of the Nation, 142  
Arze, José Antonio, 14, 15, 27, 38, 39, 43, 44, 50, 56  
Asamblea Popular, 124, 137, 138, 139, 141  
Asplazu, Jesús, 64  
Ayala Mercado, Emilio, 15  
Ayoroa, Major, 22  
Ayorros Arandona, Abel, 108  
Baldivieso, Enrique, 39  
Banco Minero, 38  
*Bandera Roja*, 27  
Banzer Suárez, Hugo, 124, 135, 141, 143, 144, 145, 149, 150, 152  
Barrientos, Rene, 114, 123, 126, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133  
Barrientos-Ovando regime, 131  
"Batallón Colorado," 129  
Bedregal, Guillermo, 107, 110, 143  
Belmonte, Elías, 43  
Belzú, Manuel, 6, 7  
Bernal, Waldo, 152  
Bloque Minero. *See* "Miners' Bloc"  
Bolívar, Simón, 6  
Bolivian National Revolution: agrarian reform and, 54, 93; background of, 33; beginning of, 2, 39, 41, 75; Confederación Boliviana de Trabajadores ended by, 69; end of, 78, 113, 115; foreign observers of, 94; George Eder not sympathetic with, 100;

- impact on organized labor, 84-86; nature of, 3; Paz Estenssoro its first president, 163
- Bolivian Railway Company y F.C. Antofagasta-Bolivia, 45
- Bolivian Social Security Institute, 169
- Bolivia Power Company, 45
- Borda, Arturo, 32
- Borda, Hector, 23
- Brossman, Goosen, 107, 110
- Busch, Germán, 37, 39, 43, 44, 45
- Butrón, Germán, 79, 80, 81, 82, 84, 86, 88, 90
- Calvo, José Maria, 163
- Capellano, Nelson, 51, 66
- Carter, Jimmy, 149, 154
- Carvajal, Emilio, 51, 52
- Catholic Bishops Conference, 166
- Catholic Church, 8
- Catholic Workers Circle of Potosí, 25
- CBT. *See* Confederación Boliviana de Trabajadores
- CEN: *See* National Executive Committee
- Central Bank, 93, 159
- Central Obrera Boliviana:
  - beginning of as dominant labor group, 2; cabinet members chosen by, 90; in elections, 150, 157; First Congress of, 96, 97, 98; founding of, 79; and General Flores, 153; general strikes called by, 128, 134, 156, and Hernán Siles, 91, 106, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163; Lechín ousted as head of, 168; and new peasant confederation, 150; and Paz Estenssoro, 125, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168; and Political Thesis, 137, 148; reestablishment of, 149; reorganization under Ovando, 133; and revival of local unions, 149; temporary split in, 102, 105; Torrelío government and, 155, 156; and Triangular Plan, 112; Trotskyites' early control of, 80; Walter Guevara Arce and, 109
- Central Obrera de Estudios Sociales, 12, 16, 17, 18
- Central Obrera Nacional, 58
- Centro Typográfico, 10
- Chaco War:
  - and defeat of Bolivia, 9; and establishment of parties, 2, 19; exiles during, 20; labor movement and, 1, 10, 12, 15, 24, 26, 30, 39, 40; prisoners of returned from Paraguay, 41; weapons of used by peasant militia, 114
- Chávez, Nufflo, 82, 90, 95-96, 98, 100, 102, 104
- Christian Democrats, 137
- Christian trade unions, 131
- Chumcero, Romundo, 25
- CIT. *See* Inter American Confederation of Workers
- Claridad*, 13
- Club de Igualdad, 8
- Club Social Obrero, 13
- COB. *See* Central Obrera Boliviana
- co-gobierno*, 89-91
- Comando Político, 136, 139, 141
- COMIBOL. *See* Corporación Minera de Bolivia
- Comintern. *See* Communist International
- Comité Israelita of La Paz, 140
- Communist International, 16, 19, 24, 26, 38
- Communist Party of Bolivia, 19, 27, 28, 56, 86, 87, 89, 107, 109, 126
- Communist Party of the United States, 38
- Compania Estanifera Llallagua, 21

- CONADE. *See* Consejo Nacional de Defensa de la Democracia
- Confederación Bancaria. *See* Confederation of Bank Workers
- Confederación Boliviana del Proletario, 25
- Confederación Boliviana de Trabajadores, 67, 69
- Confederación Boliviana del Trabajo, 25, 30
- Confederación de Empleados Particulares. *See* Confederación Sindical de Empleados Particulares
- Confederación de Trabajadores Campesinos. *See* Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores Campesinos
- Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina, 79, 87
- Confederación de Trabajadores de Bolivia, 51
- Confederación General del Trabajo of Argentina, 86
- Confederación General de Trabajadores Fabriles, 84, 89, 126, 142, 144, 147
- Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, 24, 25, 61
- Confederación Nacional de Maestros, 58, 160
- Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores Campesinos, 104, 133, 142
- Confederación Obrera Regional Boliviana, 26, 30
- Confederación Sindical de Chóferes de Bolivia, 45, 59, 154, 158
- Confederación Sindical de Empleados Particulares, 88, 105
- Confederación Sindical de la Construcción, 85
- Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores Bolivianos: attacks on by José Antonio Arze, 44; comparison of to FOL, 60, 61; fraternal delegates of sent to student congress, 15; disappearance of, 79; founding of, 2, 42; during Germán Busch regime, 43; and overthrow of Villarroel, 55; in Sexenio period, 59; during Villarroel regime, 50, 53
- Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores Ferroviarios de Bolivia, 45, 55, 58, 59, 89, 104, 112, 142
- Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores Ferroviarios y Ramos Anexos, 84, 85
- Confederación Sindical Latino Americana, 27
- Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos Bolivianos, 152, 154, 159
- Confederation of Bank Workers, 93, 103, 104, 143
- Confederation of Factory Workers. *See* Confederación General de Trabajadores Fabriles
- Confederation of Petroleum Workers, 85, 147
- Confederation of Private Businessmen, 160
- Congreso Obrero de Estudios, 24
- Congress of Industrial Organizations, 48, 87
- Consejo Nacional de Defensa de la Democracia, 152, 153
- control obrero*, 89, 91-93
- Corporación Minera de Bolivia: and closing of mines, 167; COB proposals for, 159, 161; Colonel Juan Lechín head of, 128; *control obrero* in, 92, 93; establishment of, 76; 1959 strike in, 107; Triangular Plan in, 110, 127; union leaders of reject government control, 147
- Corr, Edwin, 160
- Costa L., Alfredo, 64
- Cruz, Ascensio, 152

- CSTB. *See* Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores de Bolivia
- Cuenca, Luis, 46
- Dangler, Jorge, 41
- Daza, Victor, 67, 68
- Decree 17531, 155
- Decree 17610, 155
- Defensa Obrera*, 11
- Delgado González, Trifonio:  
     Chaco War's impact on labor movement noted by, 33;  
     COB's absence noted by, 126; on CSTB, 44, 79;  
     economic crisis at end of first Paz Estenssoro administration described by, 100; on First Congress of COB, 97, 98; growth of unions after National Revolution noted by, 86; on labor movement under Banzer, 141, 144; on labor situation under Torres, 139; on mutual benefit societies, 8; on "night of San Juan," 132; on PIR relations with Villarroel regime, 50; Pulacayo Thesis discussed by, 64; on union leaders willing to become labor coordinators, 147  
     Department of Criminal Investigation, 127
- Departmental Labor Center, 85
- Departmental Peasant Federation of Cochabamba, 132
- Díaz, Emilio, 21
- Dunkerley, James, 149, 150, 151, 153, 154, 155
- Eder, George, 100, 101, 102
- EFE news agency, 163, 165
- Ejército de Liberación Nacional, 140
- El Diario*, 138
- El Federado*, 13
- El Ingenio Continente Americano*, 19
- El Obrero Gráfico*, 10
- El Pais*, 160
- El Proletario*, 13
- Elio, Tomás Manuel, 46
- Eróstegui, Rodolfo, 168, 169, 170, 171
- Escobar, Federico, 111, 112, 125
- Escobar, Filenon, 148
- Fabrica Nacional de Armas of Argentina, 114
- Factory Workers Confederation. *See* Confederación General de Trabajadores Fabriles
- Factory Workers Federation of La Paz, 142
- Falange Socialista Boliviana, 38, 40, 124, 141
- Federación Agraria Departamental, 60, 61, 62, 79
- Federación Anarquista Ibérica, 61
- Federación Central de la Paz, 45
- Federación de Artes de Bolivia, 10
- Federación de Estudiantes of Cochabamba, 14
- Federación del Sur, 45
- Federación Gráfica, 85
- Federación Nacional de Trabajadores Gráficos, 45
- Federación Obrera Boliviana, 10
- Federación Obrera Central, 13
- Federación Obrera Central Uncía, 21, 22
- Federación Obrera de La Paz, 10, 11, 28
- Federación Obrera del Trabajo of La Paz, 12, 17, 25, 27, 28
- Federación Obrera del Trabajo of Oruro, 13, 29, 30
- Federación Obrera del Trabajo of Sucre, 25
- Federación Obrera Femenina, 29, 60, 62, 80

- Federación Obrera  
     Internacional, 11, 12, 32  
 Federación Obrera Local, 2, 28,  
     29, 42, 59, 60, 61, 79  
 Federación Obrera of Uyuni, 14  
 Federación Obrera Regional  
     Argentina, 26, 30  
 Federación Obrera (Sección  
     Boliviano), 24  
 Federación Obrera Sindical de  
     Oruro, 68  
 Federación Sindical de  
     Empleados de Comercio, 58  
 Federación Sindical de  
     Trabajadores Mineros de  
     Bolivia:  
         control of COMIBOL taken  
         by, 159; disappearance of as  
         backbone of labor movement,  
         170; electoral policy of, 152;  
         defeat of by Paz Estenssoro  
         government, 167; founding  
         congress of, 51; Fourteenth  
         Congress of, 133; and Juan  
         Lechín, 168; membership of  
         in 1947, 59; Ninth Congress  
         of, 108; Pulacayo Congress  
         of, 63, 64; role of during  
         Sexenio, 63, 65, 66, 67;  
         Second Congress of, 52  
 Federación Universitaria  
     Boliviana, 14-15  
 Federation of Miners and  
     Workers of Corocoro, 14  
 Federation of Newsboys, 13  
 Ferrocarril de La Paz-Yungas-  
     Beni, 45  
 Figueras, René, 138  
 Flores, Genaro, 152, 153  
 Flores Gironda, Donato, 38  
 FOI. *See* Federación Obrera  
     Internacional  
 FORA. *See* Federación Obrera  
     Regional Argentina  
 Fortún Sanjinés, Federico, 114  
 FOT. *See* Federación Obrera del  
     Trabajo  
 FOT of Sucre, 14  
 Fourth Convention of Students,  
     15  
 Fourth Labor Congress, 26, 30  
 Frente de Izquierda Boliviana,  
     38, 42, 43  
 Frente Popular Nacionalista,  
     124, 141, 145  
 Frente Unión Socialista, 43  
 FSTMB. *See* Federación Sindical  
     de Trabajadores Mineros de  
     Bolivia  
 Gallard, Luis, 26, 30  
 Gallardo Lozado, Jorge, 129,  
     134, 135, 137, 140  
 García Meza, Luis, 152, 153,  
     154, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157  
 Goodrich, Carter, 94  
 Grupo Obrero Tupac Amaru, 38  
 Gueiler, Lidia, 124, 151  
 Guevara, Che, 130, 138, 140  
 Guevara Arce, Walter, 77, 78,  
     84, 109, 124, 150, 151  
 Hertzog, Enrigue, 40, 55, 65, 68  
 Hinojosa, Roberto, 51, 55  
 Hochschild mines, 9, 43, 76  
 Hoge, Warren, 153  
 Hormazábal, Manuel, 67  
 Huanchaca Company, 20  
 Humboldt, Ciro, 142  
 Ibáñez, Andrés, 8  
 Ibáñez, Bernardo, 68  
 Inca Empire, 5  
 Industrial Workers of the World,  
     30  
 Inter American Confederation of  
     Workers (CIT), 67, 68  
 International Confederation of  
     Free Trade unions, 87  
 International Cooperation  
     Administration, 114  
 International Monetary Fund,  
     100, 151, 157, 158  
 International Workingmen's  
     Association, 25, 26  
 Iturralde, Abel, 24  
 Jáuregui, Arturo, 67  
 Jefferson School, 38



Junta Militar, 125, 127, 128, 134

Juventud Obrera Católica, 86

Kerenskyist government, 87

*Labor Action*, 81

"Labor Coordinators," 116

*La Hmanidad*, 28

La Paz-Guaqui Railroad Workers Union, 68

Lara, Felix, 104

Law 11,497, 146

Law of State Security, 133

Lechín, Juan:

April 1952 uprising led by, 75; arrest of, 65; Asamblea Popular and, 138, 139; Banzer coup and, 135; CEN and, 83; and COB, 79, 81, 82, 97, 98, 105, 128, 168; Communists laughed at by, 82; *control obrero* and, 91; correspondence of with CIO, 87; election of to senate, 56, 64; exile of, 127, 141, 148, 164; and FSMTB, 63, 167, 168; General Seleme and, 76; and general strikes, 107, 151, 153; maneuvers of with President Siles, 157, 158, 159, 160; membership of in POR, 63; mine labor dispute and, 112; and miners' federation, 51, 52, 67; as minister of mines and petroleum, 80, 84, 90; MNR presidential nomination and, 113; Moller and, 99, 105; new party formed by, 113, 120, 143; on "night of San Juan," 131; Nuflo Chávez nominated for vice president by, 98; participation of in "dual government" alleged, 88; and Paz Estenssoro, 78, 115, 168, persecution of, 57, 127; Railroad Workers Confederation and, 112; Siles nominated for president by,

98; and Siles' stabilization program, 100, 101, 102, 103; U.S. ambassador and, 160; and Triangular Plan, 110, 111, 112; as vice president, 77

Lechín, Colonel Juan, 128, 129

Left MNR. *See* Movimiento

Nacionalista Revolucionario de la Izquierda

Legión de Ex Combatientes, 52

Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich, 138

Liberal Party, 6, 8, 9, 10, 15, 55

Liga de Empleados de Comercio, Industria y Banca, 58

Liga Radical Obrera, 9

Liga Universitaria Nacional, 14

Lino Urquieta, Miguel, 16

Lloyd Aereo Boliviano, 93

López Aliaga, Luis, 68

López Arias, Víctor, 148, 168

Lora, César, 107

Lora, Guillermo:

arrest of, 66; on Asamblea Popular and President Torres, 138, 139; *Bandera Roja* described by, 27; on Barrientos and peasant support, 132; on Belzú, 7; brother of leads a strike, 107; Catavi Massacre described by, 46, 47; on Centro Obrero de Estudios Sociales, 12, 16; on COB, 79, 96, 128, 133; on Cochabamba labor federation, 13; Comando Político described by, 136, 137; on Communists, 26, 27, early labor movement described by, 7; and Ejército de Liberación Nacional, 140; election of to Chamber of Deputies, 64; exile of, 141; on Federación Ferroviaria, 23; Federación Obrera de La Paz discussed by, 11; FOL described by, 29; on foreigners' role in Bolivian anarchist groups, 28, 33; FOT characterized by, 12; as

- labor leader in Torres regime, 135; on Lechín, 109, 111, 115, 125; Massacre of Potosí described by, 56; May Day (first) celebration described by, 10–11; on miners' unions secret meetings, 129; on "night of San Juan," 131; on Operation Disarmament and miners' unions, 127; Oruro labor opposition to Chaco War cited by, 30; Partido Socialista Revolucionario, 19; on party affiliation of organized labor, 30, 31, 32; policy of labor minister Vicente Mendoza outlined by, 129; as POR leader, 56, 63, 133; Pulacayo Thesis and, 63; on role of FAD, 61; on second student congress, 14, 15; on Socialist Party of La Paz, 17; on Sociedad Agustín Aspiazu leaders, 16; spread of Socialist parties noted by, 18; Tristán Marof's career sketched by, 20; union problems characterized by, 130; on unions in pre-Chaco War, 14
- Magisterio Nacional, 15
- Malloy, James, 90, 91, 110, 111
- "Mandate of the Popular Forces," 136
- Marof, Tristán, 19,
- Mendivil, Lucio, 17, 64
- Mendizábel, Alfredo, 64
- Menzoba, Vicente, 129
- Mendoza Mamani, Carlos, 19, 24, 25, 27
- Miami Herald*, 141
- Military Junta. *See* Junta Militar
- "Miners Bloc," 56, 64
- Ministry of Labor, 127, 145, 161
- Ministry of Peasant Affairs, 93, 94, 97, 105
- Miranda, Rojelio, 134
- Mitchell, Christopher, 39, 40, 56, 86, 95, 108, 109, 114, 167
- MNR. *See* Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario
- Moisés, Gabriel, 26, 30
- Moisés, Jorge, 30
- Moller, Edwin, 79, 82, 88, 89, 99, 105, 106
- Monje Gutiérrez, Tomás, 16, 40, 57
- Monroy Bloc, Germán, 52
- Mostajoy, Pedro Agustín, 61
- Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria, 137, 150, 156, 168
- Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario:  
and accusations of forcing unionists to join party, 86;  
and affiliations of new recruits, 104; and agrarian reform, 54; and CADE, 152; cogovernment of with COB, 90; difficulties of its regime, 76, 77; disintegration of, 77; and duration of power, 76; Emilio Carvajal as member of, 51; FOL denunciation of, 62; founding of, 38, 39; Guillermo Bedregal as subchief of, 143; jailing of members, 141; labor support sought by, 40; as leader of Bolivian National Revolution, 1; members of in COB Executive, 144; miners' federation dominated by, 2; in 1951 election, 75; outlawry of, 56; overthrow of, 123, 170; Paz Estenssoro faction of aligned with Falange Socialista Boliviano, 124, 141; peasant movement dominated by, 96; representation of in Asamblea Popular, 137; in SigloXX-Catavi, 130; split in over Siles' stabilization

- program, 106; spread of during Bolivian National Revolution, 94; and Villarroel support of Indians, 54
- Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario de la Izquierda, 124, 150, 158
- Moya Quiroga, Víctor Rufino, 13
- National Congress of Workers, 24
- National Executive Committee, 83
- National Peasant Confederation, 95
- National Wage Commission, 155
- National Workers Congress, 83
- Nationalist Democratic Action, 150
- Nationalist Party, 9, 31
- Natusch, Alberto, 151
- Nava, Máximo, 20
- Navarro, Gustavo, 19, 38
- Nazis, 43, 62
- New York Times*, 153, 166
- "night of San Juan," 130, 131, 132
- "Obligatory Civil Service," 146
- Open Letter to President Paz Estenssoro, 81
- "Operation Disarmament," 127
- Ordoñez, Felipe, 32
- Ovando, Alfredo, 115, 123, 132, 133, 134, 136
- Paco Careaga, Adolfo, 59
- Pact of Mutual Defense, 26
- Padilla, David, 150
- Palacios, Alfredo, 17
- Partido Comunista. *See* Communist Party
- Partido Comunista of Roberto Hinojosa, 51
- Partido Conservador, 6, 9
- Partido de Izquierda Revolucionaria, 2, 38, 41, 44, 50, 55, 56, 62, 65, 68, 89, 104
- Partido de la Revolución Boliviana, 51
- Partido Laborista, 18, 19, 30
- Partido Obrero, 18
- Partido Obrero Revolucionario:
  - activity of in unions, 68;
  - beginning of, 15, 38, 39;
  - Edwin Moller and, 89; Lora brothers' leadership in, 107;
  - and miners' federation, 63, 88; Nelson Capellano as member of, 51; Pact of Mutual Defense and, 126;
  - role of in COB, 80, 86; role of in land seizure, 95; role of in unions under Torres government, 137
- Partido Obrero Socialista Boliviano, 38, 39, 42, 44
- Partido Obrero Socialista in La Paz, 18
- Partido Obrero Socialista of Uyuni, 14
- Partido Republicano, 9, 19, 24, 30
- Partido Revolucionario Auténtico, 77, 109
- Partido Revolucionario de la Izquierda Nacionalista, 113, 126, 130, 143, 151, 168
- Partido Social Democrático, 86, 123
- Partido Socialista del Estado, 37, 39
- Partido Socialista of 1970s, 137, 152
- Partido Socialista of 1930, 19
- Partido Socialista of Potosí, 17
- Partido Socialista Revolucionario, 19, 51
- Partido Unión Republicana Socialista, 40, 55
- Patiño, Simón, 8, 20, 21, 45, 46, 52, 65, 76
- Paz Estenssoro, Víctor:
  - anti-inflation program of, 164, 165, 167, 169; as ambassador to Great Britain, 109; COB and, 98, 125, 164, 168; on Comité Israelita of La

- Paz, 140; decision of to shut down part of COMIBOL, 125; economic crisis at end of first administration, 98; economic development during second administration of, 110; in elections, 4, 77, 113, 109, 124, 150, 152; escape of after overthrow of Villarroel, 55; Guevara Arce and, 109; labor peace and second administration of, 109; Lechín and, 97, 98, 113; on military dangers, 114; and MNR, 14, 48, 77, 87, 94, 124, 137, 141, 143, 150; overthrow of, 78; on peasants and Chaco War weapons, 143; petroleum code established by, 133; presidency of, 4, 76, 98, 115, 163; regime of compared to Junta Militar, 127; return of from exile, 141; Triangular Plan of, 110, 127
- Peñaloza, Luis, 38, 39
- Peñaranda, Enrique, 37, 38, 40, 45
- Perales, Ricardo, 17, 18
- Pereda, Juan, 124, 149, 150
- Pereira, José, 82
- Perón, Juan, 86
- Pimentel, Irineo, 111, 112
- PIR. *See* Partido de Izquierda Revolucionaria
- pongueaje*, 49, 54, 93
- Popular Workers Parliament, 136
- Portillo Company, 21
- PRIN. *See* Partido Revolucionario de la Izquierda Nacionalista
- pro-Chinese Communist Partido of Bolivia, 130, 143, 150
- pro-Soviet Communist of Bolivia, 124, 130, 137, 143, 150, 152, 158, 166
- Prudencio, Fermín, 10
- Pulacayo Thesis, 63, 64, 66, 67
- Queiróz, Florentino, 53, 67
- Quintanilla, Carlos, 37
- Radical Party 9
- Railroad Workers Confederation. *See* Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores Ferroviarios de Bolivia and Confederación de Trabajadores Ferroviarios y Ramos Afines
- Railroad Workers Retirement Fund, 45
- Razón de Patria, 48
- Reagan, President, 154
- Rebelión*, 81
- Recabarren, Luis Emilio, 67
- Red International of Labor Unions, 24, 25
- "*relacionadores*," 155
- Reorganizing Committee of the Federación Obrera de Potosí, 25
- Republican Party. *See* Partido Republicano
- Revolutionary Peoples Committee, 125
- Rey, Juan, 81, 87
- Reyes, Simón, 148, 152, 158, 166, 168
- Rifkind, Bernard, 111
- Rejas, Adam, 64
- Rojas, José, 108
- Rosas, José Manuel de, 8
- Rosca*, 2, 17
- Revolutionary Christian Democrats, 137, 140
- Russian Bolsheviks, 87
- Saavedra, Bautista, 9, 19, 30, 31
- Saavedra, Zenón, 17
- Said Company, 28
- Salamanca, David, 32
- Salamanca, Humberto, 64
- Salvatierra, Ezequiel, 11, 17, 18
- Sánchez Hernández, Herman, 44
- Sanjinés, Juan, 82, 84, 98, 104, 112, 142

- Sanjinés Rodríguez, Oscar, 158, 159
- Schwarz, Ernst, 87
- School of Higher Military Studies, 114
- Second Congress of Students, 15
- Secretariat of Peasant Affairs, 41
- Seleme, Antonio, 75, 76
- Servicio Especial de Seguridad, 154
- Servicio Nacional de Reforma Agraria, 95
- Siles, Hernán:  
     in April 1952 revolt, 75; crisis of in beginning of administration, 91; economic crisis and, 100, 102, 104, 106, 121, 158, 159, 160, 161; economic development in administration of, 110; in elections, 41, 75, 76, 98, 124, 150, 152, 157; General Seleme and, 76; growth of military in regime of, 78, 113; hunger strike declared by, 104; José Rojas named minister of peasant affairs by, 108; kidnapping of, 161; MNR and, 77, 106; opposition of to Guevara Arce vice presidential candidacy, 109; Paz Estenssoro and, 78, 115, 163; resignation of, 107, 162; tripartite cabinet formed by, 158; Unión Democrática Popular headed by, 149
- Siles, Hernando, 9, 25, 30, 31, 32, 75
- Siles, Luis Adolfo, 123, 132
- Sinani, Fernando, 38
- Sindicato de Albaniles, Constructores y Ramos Similares, 61
- Sindicato de Culinerias, 60
- Sindicato de Metalúrgicos, 56
- Sindicato de Trabajadores Christian Nielso, 60
- Sindicato de Trabajadores en Cuero, 60
- Sindicato de Trabajadores en Hospitales, 61
- Sindicto de Trbajadores en Mosálicos, 60
- Sindicato de Viajeras de Arica a la Paz, 100
- Sindicato Femenino de Oficios Varios, 29
- Sindicato Lloyd Aereo Boliviano, 85
- Sindicato Mixto de Huanuni, 51
- Social Democratic Party. *See* Partido Democrático
- Social Security Fund, 159
- Socialist parties—spread of, 18
- Socialist Party of Cochabamba, 13
- Socialist Party of La Paz, 12, 17
- Sociedad Agustín Aspiazú, 16
- Soruco, Ricardo, 18, 23
- South American Bureau of Comintern, 27
- Stabilization Council, 100
- Standard Oil Company, 37, 43
- State Socialist Party. *See* Partido Socialista del Estado
- Suazo, Alfredo, 27
- Sucre, Arturo José de, 6
- Supreme Decree 11,952, 146, 147
- Supreme Decree 21,060, 169
- Tamayo, Franz, 9
- Tejada Sorzano, José Luis, 32, 37, 41
- Terrazas, Admiral, 152
- Terrazas, Julio, 166
- Tierra y Libertad*, 28
- Torres, Juan José, 124, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142
- Torrelío, Celsio, 155, 156
- Torro, Mario, 52, 64, 65, 67, 104, 107, 126
- Transport Workers Confederation. *See* Confederación Sindical de

- Chóferes de Bolivia  
Triangular Plan, 110, 111, 127  
Trotsky, Leon, 81
- UDP. *See* Unión Democrática Popular
- Unión Cívica Solidaridad, 168
- Unión Democrática Popular, 149, 151, 152
- Unión Gráfica of Cochabamba, 13
- Unión Gráfica Nacional, 9, 10
- Unión Sindical de Fabriles. *See* Unión Sindical de Trabajadores Fabriles Nacionales
- Unión Sindical de Trabajadores Fabriles Libres, 68
- Unión Sindical de Trabajadores Fabriles Nacionales, 53, 57, 59, 60, 67, 108
- Unión Sindical de Trabajadores Fabriles of Torija, 84
- United Front of the Opposition, 64
- United Nations Economic Commission to Bolivia, 94
- United Press International, 144
- Universidad Popular de La Paz, 24
- Urriolagoitia, Mamerto, 40, 41, 65, 68, 75, 85
- U.S. Department of Labor, 83
- Valencia, Alipio, 38, 39
- Varela, Augusto, 18
- Vargas, Aníbal, 64,
- Vargas, Mario, 148, 149
- Venezuelan Acción Democrática, 113
- Vertiz Blando, Luciano, 29
- Vildoso, Guido, 136
- Villarroel, Gualberto:  
agrarian reform proposed in administration of, 94;  
government of and founding of miners' federation, 51;  
labor disputes during regime of, 53, 54; overthrow of, 16, 40, 51, 55, 58, 62, 63;  
overtures of to Indians, 54, 93; presidency of, 2, 38, 40, 48
- Villarroelism, 69
- Wallace, Henry, 47
- War of the Pacific, 6
- Weekly Report*, 162
- Workers Coordinating Committee, 68
- World Federation of Trade Unions, 87, 168
- Zegada, José, 79

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